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By

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BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

Miss Sadie Loyes, the manageress of the Hotel Weltmore Typewriting and Secretarial Bureau, set down the receiver of the telephone which had its place upon her desk and looked thoughtfully around at the eleven young ladies who comprised her present staff. She stood there, an angular, untidy-looking person, tapping a pencil against her teeth, unconscious arbitress, not only of the fate of two very interesting people, but also of the fate of a great nation. Portentous events depended upon her decision. A man's life in this teeming city of New York was a small enough matter of itself. The life of this prospective client of hers, however, waiting now in his suite on the eleventh floor for the help which he had summoned, was hung about with destiny. Meanwhile, Miss Sadie Loyes continued to tap her teeth with the pencil and reflect. Which should it be? The nearest and apparently the most industrious?

Her eyes rested disparagingly upon Miss Bella Fox's golden-brown coiffure. These were dressy days in New York and style was all very well in its way, but there was no mistaking the abbreviations of the young lady's costume — very low from the throat downwards and displaying a length of limb which, although perhaps sanctioned by fashion, paid no excessive tribute to modesty. Miss Fox's jewellery, too, was a little in evidence and there were rumours about dinners at the Ritz! On the whole perhaps it would be better to keep this particular young lady back for one of these western millionaires. Dorothy Dickson might do: a young woman of far more modest appearance, but a little careless

with her shorthand. Possibly it was as well not to risk her on an important assignment. Then there was Florence White — expert enough, but a little mysterious in her private life, and the recipient of too many boxes of candy and offerings of roses from her clients to inspire her employer with thorough confidence as to her commercial ability. Then the pencil stopped. Miss Borans! Nothing whatever against her; efficient, self-contained, reserved alike in dress and demeanour, but with an air of breeding which none of these others possessed. Absolutely an obvious choice!

"Miss Borans," the manageress called out, in a shrill tone, "just step this way, please."

The young lady addressed rose with composure, pushed her chair back into its place, and approached her employer. Space was limited in the Hotel Weltmore and the Typewriting and Secretarial Bureau was really a railed-off portion of the lounge on the first floor reserved for "Ladies Only."

"I guess you'd better slip up to number eleven hundred and eighty," Miss Loyes directed. "I'll send a machine and the rest of the stuff right along — gentleman there in a hurry — his secretary caught the fever while he was in Washington. Samara, his name is — the Good Lord knows where he got it!"

The girl seemed to stiffen.

"Samara, the Russian envoy?" she asked.

"You've got it, honey. Speaks with an English accent, though, you could cut with a knife."

"I would rather not work for Gabriel Samara," the girl declared.

It took a great deal to surprise Miss Sadie Loyes, but this newest recruit to her secretarial staff had certainly succeeded.

"How?" she exclaimed. "What's that?"

Miss Borans had not in the least the appearance of a young woman of mercurial or changeable temperament. Nevertheless, she seemed already to be repenting her rather rash pronouncement.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Loyes," she said. "That was perhaps a foolish speech of mine. Number eleven hundred and eighty, you said. I will go there at once."

"Say, do you know anything of this Mr. Samara?" the manageress enquired.

"Nothing personally," was the prompt reply.

"You haven't worked for him before? He hasn't tried to be familiar with you or anything of that sort?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what's the idea, eh?"

Miss Borans hesitated.

"I am of Russian descent," she confided. "One has prejudices. It was foolish."

Miss Sadie Loyes had had a great deal of experience of the younger members of her sex, and she studied her employee for a minute thoughtfully. Miss Catherine Borans conformed to no type with which she was familiar. She was a young woman of medium height, slim and with the promise of a perfect body beneath the almost Quaker-like simplicity of her gown. She was rather full-faced, with a broad forehead, dark silky eyelashes and clear brown eyes. Her features were distinguished by reason of their clean-cut clarity, her mouth was perfectly shaped although her lips were a little full. Her expression was not to be reckoned with, for during the few weeks she had been employed at the Bureau she had wrapped herself in a mantle of impenetrable reserve.

"I guessed you were a foreigner," Miss Sadie Loyes remarked finally. "Well, anyways, this Mr. Samara is a great guy over there, isn't he? The New York

Press, at any rate, seems to be giving him an almighty boom."

Miss Sadie Loyes had spent a busy life in narrow ways and, leaving out England, France and Germany, "over there" represented for her the rest of Europe.

"In his way I have no doubt that he is a great man," Miss Borans acknowledged coldly. "I was foolish to have any feeling in the matter."

She passed on with her notebook in her hand, a noticeable figure in the bustling promenades of the hotel, both from the quiet distinction of her appearance and her utter indifference to the cosmopolitan throngs through which she passed. She took her place in the crowded elevator, ascended to the eleventh floor, received a pleasant nod from the young lady seated on guard at the corner of the corridor, and touched the bell of number eleven hundred and eighty.

"Mr. Samara's right there now," the latter observed from behind her desk. "I guess he's needing help badly, too. They're talking of having to take his secretary away to the hospital. Stomach trouble, I guess. These foreigners eat different to us."

The door in front of them was suddenly opened. Miss Borans was confronted by a somewhat alarming looking personage; a man of over six feet in height and broad in proportion, florid, blue-eyed and of truculent appearance. Not even the studious sombreness of his attire could bring him into line with any recognised types of domestic servitor. He stared at this visitor without speaking.

"I have come from the Typewriting Bureau downstairs to do some work for Mr. Samara," she announced.

Typists, especially of this order, were unknown quantities in the world where Ivan Rortz had spent

most of his days, but he stood aside and ushered her through the little hall to the sitting room beyond. It was of the ordinary hotel type, but flooded with light, overheated, and, as it seemed to her in those first few seconds, almost overcrowded with flowers. Everywhere they flaunted their elegance against the uncouth decorations of the room; a queer contrast of exotic beauty and pretentious ugliness. A man swung round from a writing desk to look at her, — a man who she knew at once must be Samara.

His study of her was superficial and incurious. She, on the other hand, brought all her powers of observation to bear upon the man whom it was her daily lesson to learn to hate. The illustrated Press of many countries had made his features in a sense familiar — yet, in a further sense, they had never done him justice. She saw a man of well over middle height, broad-shouldered yet with a tendency to stoop. His face was as hard as granite, cruel, perhaps, and as expressionless as her own, yet redeemed by a mouth which had wonderful possibilities of tenderness and humour. His hair was black and short, his eyebrows over-heavy, his clear grey eyes almost unduly penetrating.

"Well?" he exclaimed curtly.

"I am from the Typewriting Bureau," she announced once more.

He nodded.

"Where is your machine?"

"On the way up."

He pointed towards the book she was carrying.

"You write shorthand?"

"Certainly."

"Take down some letters. Sit where you please. I usually walk about. Some I will give you direct on to the typewriter, when it arrives."

She seated herself deliberately at the end of the table, opened her book, and glanced at her pencil to be sure that it was sharpened. Then she waited. He rose to his feet and stood with his back to her, looking out of the window. Presently he swung round, took up a sheaf of letters from the desk, and grunted as he inspected them.

"Rubbishy work," he declared, "but it must be done. Invitations to every sort of a function under the sun. One reply will do for the lot — 'Mr. Gabriel Samara regrets that he is unable to accept the invitation,' etc., etc.," his thick eyebrows almost meeting in a heavy frown. "Got that?"

"Yes," she answered.

He threw a selection of the letters on the table before her, destroying the remainder. Then he made his way back to the desk and loitered there with his hands in his pockets.

"I can't do these until the typewriter arrives," she reminded him.

"Naturally," he replied drily. "I was wondering about the rest of the work. Here is your machine."

There was a knock at the door and a boy arrived with the typewriter, which he set upon the table. Catherine Borans began her task. Presently the telephone bell rang. Samara motioned her to answer it.

"A gentleman from the *New York Hemisphere* would like to see you," she announced.

He shook his head.

"You can answer all applications from journalists in the same manner," he said. "Just tell them that Mr. Samara has nothing to communicate to the Press — with one exception, mind. A Mr. Bromley Pride will ring up from the *New York Comet*. I will accord him an interview. And, whilst we are on this subject,

be so good as to inform the young lady outside that I will not have people waiting about in the corridor to waylay me when I come out. My lips are sealed. I have nothing to say to any one."

Miss Borans carried out her instructions faithfully. Then she recommenced her task. Suddenly Samara paused in his restless perambulation of the room and looked at her intently.

"Are you to be trusted, young lady?" he enquired brusquely.

She abandoned her typing for a moment and looked up at him.

"I should say not," she replied.

CHAPTER II

Samara was distinctly taken aback. His expression was one of incredulous surprise, mingled with some irritation.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"My reply to your question," she explained, "was truthful, though of course relative. I should not, as a matter of fact, care to be trusted with any of your important political correspondence."

"And why not?"

"I prefer not to discuss the matter further."

He smiled with gentle sarcasm.

"May I ask if this self-advertised untrustworthiness is universal amongst the young ladies of the Bureau from which you come?"

She considered for a moment.

"Of course you can send for some one else if you like," she said. "I would not trust any one of them with confidential documents, though. Your private secretary is the person to deal with them."

"But my private secretary," he confided, "is ill. They are talking of taking him to hospital."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"That is unfortunate," she admitted. "Still, you have an Embassy in Washington and a Russian Consul here. Surely they should be able to help you."

"You are without doubt a young lady of resource," he declared with an indulgent smile. "Nevertheless, there are reasons why I do not wish to avail myself of the services of any one having an official connection with my country."

"Then," she advised, "I should write my letters myself."

He stood looking down at her, his hands in his pockets, his thick eyebrows almost meeting in a heavy frown. She felt her heart beating a little more quickly. Notwithstanding her even manner and her very equable poise towards life, she was conscious of something in this man's presence which was akin to fear.

"Your candour," he said, "inspires me with a certain amount of confidence. I hate writing letters. My brain moves so much more quickly than my clumsy fingers, that anything which I put on paper is generally illegible. There is a boat leaving to-night for Cherbourg where I have a special agent waiting. It is necessary that I send an account of my negotiations here. What is to be done?"

"I can only repeat that, if your report has to do with your negotiations with the President, I should write it by hand and hope for the best," she rejoined coolly.

His eyes flashed. For a moment he seemed almost to lose control of himself.

"What in the name of all the Holy Saints of Russia do you know about my negotiations with the President?" he demanded.

"Nothing more than a few other million people of the city," she replied. "I am an intelligent student of the daily Press, like most American girls."

He looked at her suspiciously.

"I am not at all sure that you are an American girl," he growled.

"I have lived in New York for twenty-three years," she said meekly. "You may not think it, but I can assure you that has not left me much time to imbibe the instincts of other nationalities."

He sat at the opposite end of the table, staring at her, his hands in his pockets, his expression curiously dominated by the uncertain curve of his lips. For a brief moment she wondered whether he were not laughing at her.

"Are all the young ladies of the Weltmore Typewriting Bureau gifted with such glib tongues?" he enquired.

"By no means," she assured him. "Believe me, I am quite an exception. I think I was sent because I was considered the most serious minded."

"Heaven help the others!" he muttered. "Now listen. I am going to trust you to a certain extent against your own advice. I shall dictate to you all except the vital part of my communication. A great deal of what you are going to take down I should prefer you to forget. The most private part of all I shall write in my own hand, and God grant that some one at the other end will be able to read it."

Catherine Borans thrust a new sheet of paper into the typewriter and bent over her task. For half an hour or more the man opposite to her dictated. Then he took the sheets which she had typed over to his desk and drew pen and ink towards him.

"You can go on with the other work," he enjoined, commencing to write.

The scratching of his pen ceased almost as she addressed the last of her envelopes. He turned in his chair just as she had risen to her feet.

"Don't go yet," he begged, throwing another pile of letters upon the table. "There are all these to be attended to and it is necessary for some one to be here to answer the telephone. Besides, I have a question to ask you."

"A question?" she repeated doubtfully.

"Yes. I am a stranger in your country and I hope that you will gratify my curiosity. If I had dictated the vital part of this letter to you, wherein lay the fear of your probity? Do you mean that you would have sold its contents to the Press?"

"That would have been a temptation," she confessed, carelessly tapping the keys of her typewriter. "I am a working girl, you know, and am supposed to be well paid at thirty dollars a week. I think that any newspaper in New York would probably give ten thousand dollars for a true account of your conversation with the President and the arrangement at which you arrived. Fancy the clothes I could have bought and the countries I could have visited with ten thousand dollars!"

"Yes," he admitted thoughtfully, "I suppose I was running a certain amount of risk. By the bye, I presume it would have been the Press with whom you would have dealt?"

"With whom else?" she asked.

"There are others," he observed, watching her keenly; "politicians, shall we call them? — who would be curious to know the precise conclusions at which we arrived in Washington yesterday."

"Naturally," she assented.

"Even in Europe," he went on, "this business of secret societies and international espionage is a little on the wane. One nation only continues to use it as her great weapon. In America I never dreamed of coming across anything of the sort. Have I by some chance stumbled upon the unexpected, Miss — I beg your pardon, I have forgotten what you told me your name was."

"I have not told you my name."

"Please repair the omission."

"I do not see the necessity," she objected. "I am the young lady typist from the Hotel Bureau. You have been unfortunate inasmuch as I am the only one in the office likely to be interested in your mission and its results. To-morrow you had better ask for some one else. There are two or three there, perhaps not more trustworthy than I, but who will take down anything you dictate without a glimmer of comprehension. I should recommend Miss Bella Fox."

He shook his head.

"The name is sufficient," he declared. "I should dislike Miss Bella Fox and I could not dictate to her. I shall ask for you. Tell me how to do so."

"My name is Catherine Borans."

"And if I had dictated to you what I have written with my own hand, what would have been the nature of the risk I should have run?"

"I decline," she said, "to answer your question."

The telephone at her elbow rang whilst Samara stood scowling down at her. She turned and took the call. As she listened she frowned slightly.

"Tell me your name again, please?" she asked.

The name was apparently repeated. The girl spoke into the receiver.

"Please wait," she begged. "I will tell Mr. Samara that you are here."

She laid down the receiver and pushed the instrument a little away. Then she turned towards her companion.

"There is a gentleman downstairs who says that his name is 'Bromley Pride' and that he has called from the *New York Comet* to see you."

Samara nodded.

"That is quite in order," he assented. "He can come up. Please tell him so."

She did not at once obey. She was evidently perplexed.

"Since you are so much interested in my affairs," her companion continued, "I will tell you that the President himself, looking upon the paper which I understand Mr. Bromley Pride represents, as his official mouthpiece, has suggested that I confide to him a certain portion of the result of our negotiations."

"Indeed," she murmured.

"Recognising to the full," he went on, with a faint note of sarcasm in his tone, "and thoroughly appreciating that kindly interest, I would yet point out that this is a matter which is already decided. Will you kindly therefore ask Mr. Pride to step up?"

"I would do so," she replied, dropping her voice a little and holding the telephone receiver still further away, "but, as a matter of fact, he is not there."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"I happen to know Mr. Bromley Pride quite well," she explained. "I am also very well acquainted with his voice. The man who is impersonating him downstairs is a stranger!"

CHAPTER III

Gabriel Samara seemed for a moment puzzled and unable to appreciate the significance of his companion's words.

"In any case," he rejoined, "beg whoever is down there to come up. Mr. Pride has probably sent a substitute."

Catherine leaned over the instrument with an expressionless face.

"Is it Mr. Bromley Pride himself speaking?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You are to come up, then."

She laid down the receiver without remark.

"Well?" Samara demanded impatiently.

"The man who is below insists on it that he is Mr. Bromley Pride," she announced.

"And you still don't believe him?"

"I know that he is not," she replied. "I have worked for Mr. Bromley Pride. We are old acquaintances."

"Some journalistic dodge, perhaps," he muttered.

She began gathering together the paraphernalia connected with her machine.

"It is not my business," she continued quietly, "to offer you advice. I am not sure that I am disposed to do so, but as a matter of common sense I must say that I wonder at your admitting to your apartments a man who is visiting you under a false name when you have a document, presumably of some interest to the world, lying there on your desk."

Samara looked at her with wide-open eyes.

"But my dear young lady," he protested, "we are in the very centre of civilization. This is New York!"

"A city of which you are evidently extremely ignorant."

Her attitude suddenly inspired him with disquietude. He began to reflect.

"There are some people, of course," he muttered, "who would give the price of a kingdom to know this before I got home. But surely — here ——"

She interrupted him.

"Mr. Samara," she said quietly, "I have read several biographies of you. In every one of them, the chronicler has observed that, for a diplomatist of world-wide fame, you are possessed of a remarkably unsuspicious nature. I agree with your chroniclers. Good morning."

"Stop!" he begged her.

There was the sound of the bell. It was rung in quite an ordinary manner, but to both of them there seemed something sinister in its drawn-out summons. She looked at him.

"Your servant?"

"He is sitting with my secretary, Andrew Kroupki."

"I will answer the door," she announced.

"And remain, if you please," he insisted.

She turned away, threw open the outside door, and returned a moment later, ushering in a visitor. She made no comment as she stood on one side to let him pass, but both she and Samara himself studied the newcomer curiously. He was a pleasant-looking man, neatly dressed, with an amiable expression, and the shoulders of an athlete. He carried a black portfolio under his arm, which he set down carefully upon the table, close to the typewriter, before proceeding to in-

troduce himself. His voice, when he spoke, was distinctly a home product and free from any foreign accent.

"I am very pleased to meet you, Mr. Samara," he said, as he gripped the latter's hand. "This is an honour I appreciate very highly."

Samara motioned his visitor towards a chair. He was wondering why his dislike had been of such quick conception.

"I must tell you, Mr. Pride," he explained, "that my own desire was to have kept absolutely secret the nature of my negotiations with your Government until I had had an opportunity of setting them before my advisers in Moscow. Your President, however, thought that complete reticence as to my mission would be too much to ask of your Press and that therefore an idea of the arrangement concluded had better be given to a representative journal such as your own."

"Quite so," the visitor murmured. "My paper holds almost an official position here."

"May I ask what post you occupy upon it?" Samara enquired.

"I am a member of the Board of Directors," was the prompt reply. "I am also leader writer on international affairs."

"And your name is Pride?"

"Yes — James D. Bromley Pride. You can speak right out to me. No need to keep a thing back!"

A quiet voice from the other end of the room suddenly intervened. The words themselves seemed harmless enough, but their effect was cataclysmic.

"There is surely some mistake. Mr. Bromley Pride of the *New York Comet* is in Philadelphia."

Samara himself was a little taken aback by the unexpected intervention of his temporary secretary. The

expression on his visitor's face was momentarily illuminative.

"Who is this?" he demanded sharply.

"My name is Catherine Borans," was the composed reply. "I belong to the Typewriting Bureau downstairs. I have often worked for Mr. Pride. You are not he."

The pseudo Mr. Pride had regained his presence of mind. He pointed to the card which he had laid upon the table.

"This young woman's interference is impertinent and absurd," he declared. "If I am not Bromley Pride of the *New York Comet*, how is it that I am here at all? I received my instructions from the editor himself this morning."

Samara looked across towards Catherine.

"Telephone the editor of the *New York Comet*," he directed. "Ask him to send some one round to identify this gentleman. I do not wish to be offensive," he went on, turning to his visitor, "but your identity is a matter upon which I must be entirely assured."

The *sang froid* of this caller of disputed personality was amazing. Before Catherine could take off the receiver he stepped quickly towards the telephone and faced them both.

"The young lady has spoken the truth," he confessed. "I am not Bromley Pride. I am, as a matter of fact, the representative of a rival newspaper. You do not need to be told, Mr. Samara, that here in New York a live journalist will go further than assume another man's name to get hold of a big scoop — and then some! He will risk more even than being thrown down eleven flights of stairs! Is there any price you are inclined to name, sir, for the particulars which you were about to hand on to the *New York Comet?*"

Samara's eyes flashed and his frown was menacing.

"An imposter!" he exclaimed. "I request you to withdraw at once from my apartment."

"And I decline," was the prompt and determined reply. "I may tell you right away that I am prepared to go to any lengths to secure this information from you."

"Indeed," Samara scoffed. "May I ask in what direction you propose to make your effort?"

The visitor stretched out his hand backwards and, from one of the folds of that harmless-looking black portfolio which he had left propped up against the typewriter, he drew out an automatic pistol of particularly sinister appearance. His mask of amiability had gone. There was a malicious gleam in his eyes, a cruel twist to his mouth.

"Gabriel Samara," he announced, "I am no journalist at all. I am, as a matter of fact, in another line of business altogether. It is up to me to discover what arrangements you have come to with the President, and how far such arrangements are going to help you with your plans in Russia. I do not desire to alarm either you or the young lady, but I am going to have the truth."

Samara smiled contemptuously. There was not a flicker of expression in Catherine's face.

"Pray set your mind at ease so far as we are concerned," he begged. "Neither the young lady nor I are in the least alarmed at your braggadocio. As a matter of curiosity," he went on, "supposing I were disposed to submit to this highway robbery, how do you know that I should tell you the truth?"

The intruder pointed to the typewriter and to the written sheets on the desk.

"There is only one task upon which you could be

engaged this morning," he said. "I guess those sheets will do for me, anyway."

"And supposing by any remote chance I should refuse to give them to you," Samara persisted, "is it your purpose, may I ask, to assassinate me?"

"To be candid, yes," was the blunt reply. "But for the fear of canonising you in your own country, you would have been assassinated long ago. To-day things are different. Even Russia can spare you. Let the young lady fetch the papers and hand them to me."

"The young lady will do nothing of the sort," Samara declared firmly. "So much of the result of my mission as I propose to make public at present you can read in the *New York Comet* to-morrow. Now, if it is your intention to assassinate me, you had better get on with it."

The gun was slowly raised to a horizontal position. The face of the man behind it was hideously purposeful.

"What you don't realise," he said deliberately, "is that I am in earnest. You are a marked man, Gabriel Samara, less popular in your own country than you were and hated in mine. Sooner or later this would have been your end anyway, but listen — I'm telling you — your time has come now, unless you place those papers on the table in front of you — before I count five. Before I count five, mind, or I shall shoot!"

Samara looked around the room quickly. There was no fear in his face, only the reasonable search of a man who loves life for some means of escape. There was none which he could apprehend. His assailant was between him and the bell, and the breaking of a window on the eleventh floor — even if it attracted any attention in the street — would be unlikely to bring help in time. All the while the young woman behind the

typewriter was watching him, with steady eyes and unmoved expression.

"One — two — three — four ——"

"I shouldn't worry," her quiet voice interrupted soothingly. "That gun will not hurt you."

There was a second's stupefaction, then the sound of a harmless click. The silence which followed seemed intolerable, broken though it was in a matter of moments by the piercing shrillness of the whistle which Catherine held to her lips. For the first time Samara himself was dumbfounded; so was his would-be murderer, who was staring open-mouthed at his useless weapon.

"You see," the young woman who had dominated the situation explained to Samara, "this bungling conspirator — really he ought to take a lesson from one of the novelists — put down his satchel behind the cover of my typewriter, having opened it himself first — to get at his gun easily, I suppose. I saw the glitter, so whilst he was indulging in one of his little bursts of eloquence, I slipped out the cartridge roll."

She held it up. Outside there was the sound of a key in the door.

"I have a smaller gun of the same pattern at home myself, so I understand all about them," she went on equably. "And I hope you don't think I was blowing that whistle for its musical properties. It belongs to the hotel detective. What are you going to say to him, I wonder?"

The door was thrown open and a stalwart, broad-shouldered man entered hastily. He was in plain clothes but the stamp of officialdom was unmistakable.

CHAPTER IV

"I'm Brown, the hotel detective," the newcomer announced sharply. "What's wrong here?"

The pseudo Mr. Pride shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"I'm a free-lance journalist," he declared; "got connections with half a dozen New York papers. I wanted Mr. Samara's news and I tried to bluff him into giving it to me."

"A little more than that, I fancy," Samara observed. "There wasn't much bluff about your automatic."

"Are you carrying firearms?" the detective asked.

The man who called himself Pride handed over his gun.

"I'm through," he confessed. "If I could have bluffed Mr. Samara into giving me a report of his interview in Washington yesterday it would have been worth fifty thousand dollars to me. I failed and I guess it's up to me to take the consequences."

The detective was impressed but noncommittal. He appealed to Samara.

"Is this all there is to it?" he enquired.

Samara shook his head.

"The man threatened to assassinate me and appeared to be in earnest," he replied. "If the young lady there had not withdrawn the cartridges from his automatic pistol, he would probably have done so. I do not believe that he is a journalist at all. It is, I imagine, a political affair."

The detective turned to Catherine. Her deep brown eyes were filled with what appeared to be amazement. She shook her head.

"Mr. Samara was naturally alarmed," she said, "but I do not believe that he was in any actual danger."

The detective looked quickly from one to the other of the three people in the little tableau. Their faces were an interesting study. Both Samara and his would-be assassin were obviously surprised; the latter, however, quickly concealed his emotion.

"You don't think that he meant business, then?" the detective asked.

"My impression is that he was only bluffing," was the confident reply.

"Then why did you blow that whistle?" her questioner persisted.

"I am rather a nervous person," she confided. "I hated the thought that there might be trouble while I was in the room."

Samara's amazement was genuine and sincere. He came a little farther into the centre of the apartment and stood looking down at Catherine.

"You didn't hear the click, then, when he pulled the trigger of his gun?"

"Did he pull it?" she asked. "Well, after all, it wasn't loaded."

He pointed to the roll of cartridges.

"But you admitted yourself that you took those out of his gun."

She smiled enigmatically.

"This has been rather a shock to you, hasn't it?" she said. "I was quite worked up myself. I think we probably took the whole matter too seriously."

The self-styled journalist who, during the last few moments, had been suffering from an amazement equal to Samara's, recovered himself and played up to his cue.

"Of course," he declared, "it is ridiculous to im-

agine that the whole thing was more than a bluff. I wanted the news and I failed. Well, there you are! Fine or prison, it's all the same to me. I'll pay the price!"

"Have you any charge to offer, sir?" the detective enquired of Samara.

The latter considered the matter under its new aspect.

"If you will undertake," he stipulated, "to keep that man under surveillance until I am out of the country, that will satisfy me. I am convinced, however, that he is a dangerous person and, notwithstanding all that has been said, I am also convinced that he is capable of making a deliberate attempt upon my life. Under the circumstances, however, I can make no charge. If you take my advice, you will enquire into his antecedents and his connection with journalism. You may experience some surprises."

The detective was inclined to be disappointed at this tame conclusion to the affair.

"I guess we'll take you to police headquarters," he decided, turning to Bromley Pride's impersonator. "The clerk can ask you a few questions and we'll have you held. I'll take care of your gun, if you don't mind, and you can hand me over those cartridges, young lady. Will you step across with us to police headquarters, Mr. Samara, and state your case?"

Samara shook his head.

"In the face of the young lady's statements," he observed drily, "I don't think that my evidence is necessary. Do what you will about the man. I have told you the truth about him."

The detective and his charge left the room. As the latter neared the threshold he looked curiously back at Catherine. Her face, however, was inscrutable. The door closed upon them. Samara and his temporary sec-

retary were alone. The former took a cigarette and lit it.

"In the first place, young lady," he began, "will you permit me to thank you for having saved my life? In the second place, unless you wish me to die of curiosity, will you tell me at once why you gave false evidence to the detective and placed me in a rather absurd position?"

Catherine continued her task of collecting her belongings.

"If you have no more work for me," she said, "the office will be expecting me to report. They will charge you for this extra half an hour as it is."

"I engage you for the day," he declared, frowning.

"You must arrange that with Miss Loyes," she replied coldly. "I have an appointment at three o'clock."

He took up the telephone receiver.

"Typewriting Bureau — urgent," he demanded. "Good. Mr. Samara speaking. Can I secure the services of the young lady who is with me now for the rest of the day? Good! Certainly."

He replaced the receiver and turned round with a faint smile of triumph.

"You belong to me for the day," he announced.

Her fingers strayed over the keys of her machine.

"My secretarial accomplishments," she reminded him. "Not my confidence."

Samara had never been more than a casual observer of women, had never studied them intimately, had certainly never appreciated them. Other passions had lain more closely intertwined with his life. He scrutinised Catherine for the first time with half-reluctant interest, realising the finer qualities of her, the delicate femininity, coupled with an amazing self-reliance. He

realised, too, that in the subtlest of all ways she was beautiful.

"Did you know that assassin whose cause you suddenly espoused with such vigour?" he asked a little abruptly.

"I never saw him before in my life," she declared.

"Then in the name of wonder," he begged, "tell me why you chose to sit there and tell deliberate falsehoods for his sake?"

"It happened to amuse me," she observed, smiling. "After all, you have nothing to complain of. I saved your life and subsequently I prevented your taking vengeance upon your would-be murderer. We might call it quits, I think."

Samara was immensely puzzled. He frowned down at her moodily.

"Sheer sentimentality," he muttered. "I hate cutthroats. It's a dirty business shooting at unarmed men."

"He wasn't a pleasant person," she agreed. "I disliked his moustache and the colour of his tie. Shall we decide to forget him? I am at your disposal for the rest of the day. Have you letters to give me?"

He shrugged his shoulders. It was a novelty, this, to find a woman with a will as strong as his own. Then he glanced at his watch.

"I have to go out for half an hour," he announced. "I shall be glad if you will arrange the typewritten sheets I gave you and pin in the pages I wrote by hand in the proper order."

She looked at him in surprise.

"But this is the document all the trouble has been about!" she exclaimed. "I might read it!"

He crossed the room to the desk where he had been writing, collected the sheets and brought them over to her.

"My dear young lady," he said, "you are welcome to read my little contribution — if you can."

She studied the closely written pages with an apparently puzzled air.

"So that is Russian," she remarked.

He nodded. "Looks terrible, doesn't it? Here is my servant back again. Ivan, bring me my coat and hat and watch over this young lady whilst I am away. With Ivan Rortz about the place," he continued, "no one will be likely to disturb you. I shall give orders outside, too, that no visitors are permitted to enter."

She was still gazing at those sheets filled with strange-looking words.

"Very well," she assented, "I will have this all in order by the time you get back."

To all appearance nothing had happened when Samara returned from his visit to a great banking house in Wall Street. He gave his coat and hat to Ivan who was sitting — a grim, silent figure — in the little hall. Then he passed into the inner room where Catherine, having apparently completed her task, was leaning back in her chair, turning over the pages of the document which she had pinned together.

"Well?" he asked with sardonic pleasantry. "Did you make anything of it?"

She laid it down and glanced up at him.

"Naturally," she replied. "I read it."

"But the Russian part?"

"The Russian part, of course. It was the most interesting."

He stared at her. "What do you mean?" he demanded. "You can't read Russian?"

She laughed. "What an accusation!"

For a moment he looked at her. All the time he had

been troubled by a sense of a vague likeness; not, perhaps, to any particular person, but to a type.

"Surely you told me that you were an American?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Oh, no," she replied. "I told you that I had lived in America for twenty-three years."

"Then what are you?"

"As much a Russian as you are," she assured him, smiling.

CHAPTER V

Samara, though a great statesman and undoubtedly a great ruler, was a man of unsuspicious temperament and had more than once committed what might have turned out to be diplomatic blunders. He was also, however, at all times a man of action. He locked the door behind him, drew a chair in front of the telephone and sat facing the young lady whom he had engaged to be his secretary for the day.

"I think," he said, "we will have an explanation."

She smiled graciously.

"As I now know exactly the arrangements you have made with the Government of this country," she remarked, "I am perfectly willing to tell you anything you want to know."

"In the first place then," he asked, "are you a spy, and, if you are, in whose interests are you working?"

"I am nothing of the sort," she assured him. "I am in effect exactly what I seem to be. I am a young lady of New York City, of scanty means, earning a living by typewriting and secretarial work."

"But you are Russian?"

"My father and mother were both Russians," she acknowledged. "I recognise it as my country. I have lived here all my life, however."

"We are getting on," he said. "Is Borans your real name?"

"A sufficient portion of it," she answered. "The rest of it is not important."

"Will you explain to me," he went on, "why you first saved my life and then behaved so strangely with regard to my would-be murderer?"

"Now that I have read this document," she said, touching it with her fingers, "I am disposed to explain to you. I am not a spy in any sense of the word but I am a patriotic Russian. I belong to a little circle of Russians living here, who are filled with one idea as regards our country. We have not even the dignity of being a secret society. Every one knows everything about us and every one laughs at us. We look upon you with respect but as a very obstructive person."

"Upon me?" he exclaimed. "And you call yourself a patriot! Don't dare to tell me that you are a Bolshevist!"

"I am not," she replied indignantly. "I am free to confess that you have wiped Russia clean of a great curse. You have done a splendid work but you have not done it our way."

"What, in God's name, are you then?" he asked impatiently. "What party do you represent? I have dragged Russia out of the slough. I have reëstablished her institutions, her economic position. Already she is lifting her head amongst the nations of the world."

"I admit all that freely," she acknowledged. "It is because I realise what Russia owes you that you are alive. I do not wish, however, to tell you any more at present about myself and my political views. I saved your life because I believe that you are still necessary to Russia, but in a certain sense, I and your would-be assassin are alike. We share one great grievance against you. We resent — or perhaps some might say fear — your great scheme of demilitarisation."

Samara laughed a little harshly.

"Really," he said, "I never imagined that life in New York could be so interesting. The atmosphere of this room, however, is getting on my nerves. I have been through all I can stand for one morning. I can

hear the click of that wicked-looking pistol even now. Young lady, where are your friends? Why do I not know them? I thought most of the Russians in New York who had aims or views had been to see me."

She shook her head. "Not all," she told him. "There are still a few of us who hold aloof."

"Miss Borans," he invited, "will you please do me the honour of taking lunch with me?"

She rose to her feet with alacrity.

"Not in the hotel," she begged. "It isn't allowed. Anywhere else with great pleasure. I warn you, though, that my morning's work has given me an absurd appetite."

"I shall be proud to minister to it," he assured her.

They lunched at a secluded table in the balcony of the Ritz Carlton. Gabriel Samara, like many another man whose life is immersed in his work, and who finds himself committed to an unusual action in his everyday routine, was conscious of a curious light-heartedness. He felt as if he were a schoolboy at play. He, Gabriel Samara, taking his companion of a morning to luncheon in a restaurant!

"It intrigues me," she remarked, "to think that notwithstanding all your diplomats here and Mr. Bromley Pride of the *New York Comet* — who, by the way, telephoned to say that he is on his way back from Philadelphia and will see you this afternoon — I am the only person in the world with whom you can discuss the result of your mission to Washington."

"What I shall do with you, I can't imagine," he groaned. "Everything will come out in due course, naturally, but premature disclosure before I get back might do an enormous amount of harm. I have a very strenuous opposition to face, as you may realise."

"You need not be afraid," she assured him. "If

you are really going to give me *lobster newburg* I shall keep your secret! I warn you that if I thought that disclosure would aid our own cause, not all the precious stones in your mines could keep me silent, nor all the gold which will soon be flowing into your banks. As it is you are safe."

"That is something to be thankful for, at any rate," he declared. "Miss Borans, treat me with confidence. You interest me. Let us talk frankly. If indeed you are a patriotic Russian, and have studied in any way the history of our times, you will know that I too am one. Wherein does my policy of reconstruction differ from yours? Why don't you approve of demilitarisation? Why should I consent to my country keeping under arms the greatest war machine in Europe to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for another nation?"

"There I agree," she admitted. "There must be no more wars."

"But for my errand here," he continued, "there would have been war within a few years. You cannot keep four million men under arms indefinitely without trouble. If you knew the tension at the present moment, the stream of proposals, the envoys who have been continually sent to me!"

She nodded.

"Don't tell me too much about them," she warned him. "You might find that I am not so much on your side as you think."

"But this demilitarisation," he persisted. "You must approve of that. We have three perfectly trained armies, of a million men each, ready to fight at a moment's notice. Why? You know why, and so do I. Isn't it a sane thing to disband a million according to my arrangements, now that I have been able to obtain a credit in Washington for the reconstruction of the

industries for which we can use their labour? Think! In six months' time, not a man of that million will be bearing arms. They will be miners, or on the land, working in factories, on the railways, or road making, just according to their natural bent. Why, it's blood and bone in the country; a million productive toilers instead of a million wastrels!"

"Theoretically I agree," she acknowledged. "It is because I agree that I saved your life."

"Then why did you take his side?" he demanded bluntly.

"Because, although our point of view and ultimate aim are entirely different," she replied, "your would-be assassin stands, in a sense, for the same things that we do."

Samara gave the waiter an order and leaned back in his place.

"Explain," he insisted. "In as few words as possible, please. I am weary of not understanding."

"Why should I explain?" she murmured. "It is all very simple. We grant you that you have lifted Russia out of the slough, but we do not believe that your methods, that your system of government will place her back where she has a right to be."

The light broke in upon him then.

"I see!" he exclaimed. "Who are your friends here? Can I meet them?"

A sudden deepening of the little lines at the corners of her eyes and the twitching of her lips betrayed a genuine amusement.

"What a sensation I should cause if I took you to see them!" she laughingly informed him. "I can see their faces now when I present you! It would be amazing!"

"Risk it," he begged. "Why not? I am proud to

look any Russian patriot in the face and tell him who I am."

She was interested.

"Yes, I suppose you do feel like that," she observed, after a moment's pause. "Why shouldn't you? Sometimes I, myself, make almost a hero of you. I'm quite sure that I shall always be proud to think that I have lunched with the great Samara. I shall be grateful, too, for other reasons. Do you find me very greedy?"

"Delightfully so," he admitted. "All healthy people are greedy. The vice of it only creeps in with the lack of self-restraint."

"I suppose," she remarked, "my manners are good, but if you only knew how I longed to see whether he has remembered the olives with the chicken. Hold tight to your chair now, please, and prepare for a shock. I am going to ask you a sickeningly obvious question. Tell me how you like America."

Gabriel Samara looked around him thoughtfully. He answered the spirit which prompted the question rather than the question itself.

"I venerate America," he declared. "Why shouldn't I? In a sense I am the champion of modern democracy. America is a shining light to all other nations, yet I maintain that Russia, with its unified population, has a better chance of reaching the supreme heights."

"I sometimes wonder," she sighed, "whether the true spirit of a republic can flourish in a land which knows such terrible extremes of wealth and poverty?"

"It is a drawback," he agreed. "That is where we in Russia have an advantage. We are framing a new constitution. Our laws are adapted to meet existing circumstances. Communism is dead, but we shall never tolerate the multimillionaire."

"Do you think," she asked, "that Germany will ever let you become really powerful?"

"Not willingly," he replied, "but the monarchical sentiment in Germany is not strong enough yet to upset the government of the country. Germany, of course, will bitterly resent the success of my mission over here, but she will have to get rid of her republic before we need take the war scare seriously."

She looked at him across the table.

"Do you think that the monarchist party in Germany is gaining ground?" she asked.

"I know nothing about German internal affairs," he answered evasively. "I have more than enough to do to keep in touch with the trend of opinion in my own country."

The thread of conversation appeared to be suddenly broken. Samara began to ask questions about the people by whom they were surrounded. The restaurant on this fine spring morning seemed like a great nosegay of brilliant flowers. Three quarters of the guests were women and it was a season of abandonment in colour, with yellow and pink predominating. New York too, no less than Paris, was a city of subtle perfumes, cunningly distilled and exotic. Samara, smoking his cigarette with the air of an epicure, found much to interest him in his environment.

"These people are like Russians in one way," he remarked. "They spend their money."

"I have a German friend here," she confided, "who argues that there is always more extravagance under a republic. His point is that the bourgeoisie make money easily and spend it readily. The aristocrat who has to keep up a great appearance is compelled to be the more miserly of the two, apart even from the question of good taste."

"Is this the prelude to a discussion upon the ethics of government?" he suggested, smiling.

"Indeed, no," she replied. "I am not so presumptuous. My principles are matters of instinct with me. I do not argue about them. I accept them."

She helped herself to one of his proffered cigarettes and he paid the bill.

"Quite the monarchical touch," he observed. "If you are postponing your return to your native land, however, until there is a Tzar upon the throne, I am afraid you are doomed to a very long spell of homesickness."

"Who knows?" she exclaimed carelessly. "Revolutions are rather the fashion just now. I may return to find you in chains and the knout cracking once more."

She had spoken lightly enough, but he chose to take her seriously.

"As a matter of fact," he confided, "there is a certain amount of very disquieting truth in what you say. I have stamped out Bolshevism in Russia forever. The spirit of anarchistic communism, at any rate, is dead, but I honestly believe that, especially amongst the peasantry, there is an unwholesome sort of craving for the burdens of Tzardom."

"That is almost the most interesting thing that you have said," she remarked, as they rose to go. "Thanks very much for my wonderful luncheon. Do you really require my services this afternoon?"

"Without a doubt," he insisted. "I am going on from here to pay a call. At four o'clock I shall be back in my rooms. Let me find you there, if you please."

They were about to part in the hallway of the restaurant, when Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington intervened. She sailed down upon them with the air of taking both into custody; ample, fashionably dressed, a triumph of arti-

ficiality, forty — or perhaps fifty — lisping with the ingenuousness of childhood.

"Why, if this isn't our little working girl!" she exclaimed, gripping the none too willing hand of Samara's companion. "Well, well, is this where you young women who earn your livings lunch as a rule? The number of times I've asked you to make one of our little luncheon parties here, Catherine, and you have always told me 'nothing doing in working hours.'"

Catherine presented the appearance of a young person of good breeding, striving to be polite whilst in bodily pain.

"To-day is an exception," she said. "I am lunching with a fellow countryman."

Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington smiled graciously. She had just sufficient discernment, born of her social cravings, to appreciate distinction even when it did not conform to type.

"Present your friend," she suggested.

Catherine, with a deprecating glance at her companion, murmured his name. Samara bowed — a little lower perhaps than was usual in a city where handshaking is almost sacramental. He did not seem to notice, however, the pearl-gloved hand so frankly extended.

"You're not Mr. Gabriel Samara, who has come over from Russia to see our President?" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"My name," he replied, "is Gabriel Samara. I know of no other. I have just come from Washington where your President was good enough to receive me."

Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington simply quivered with excitement. It was without a doubt a most thrilling meeting.

"I want to tell you, Mr. Samara, right now," she

declared, "that you've met the one woman in New York who has read every line that's been written about you since you landed and who has been just crazy to meet you. This is going to be wonderful. Catherine's bringing you to-night, of course?"

"I beg your pardon," he observed, genuinely perplexed. "I have not the honour ——"

"Catherine? Miss Borans, of course — you will come to-night with her? It's the meeting, you know. Why, it will be great! Prince Nicholas is coming, General Orenburg, Colonel Kirdorff, the dear Grand Duchess — all of them! It's most opportune!"

Samara turned to his companion. He was guilty of a gross breach of manners. He addressed her in Russian.

"What is this woman talking about?" he demanded.

Mrs. Bossington was delighted. She rippled on before Catherine had a chance to reply.

"Such a wonderful language!" she exclaimed. "Sometimes they talk it in conclave and I can assure you, Mr. Samara, it just thrills me. Some people call it harsh. I love it. Don't you think, Catherine dear," she went on, her tone becoming almost wheedling, "that you could persuade Mr. Samara to come a little earlier and dine with us first to-night — just a very small affair — twenty covers or so? Joseph would be tickled to death."

Catherine laid her hand upon the arm of her loquacious acquaintance.

"Mrs. Bossington," she said, "I am afraid you don't quite understand. Mr. Samara is a Russian, of course, and a very distinguished one, but his aims are scarcely the aims of our friends. I do not think we should agree. It never even occurred to me to bring Mr. Samara to the meeting."

Mrs. Bossington was horrified.

"My dear," she cried, "you're crazy! There you are, a dozen of you, all Russians out of a home and out of a country and longing to get back again. Why, here's the man who can help you. Get together and talk it over. I'm only thankful it's my turn to entertain you. I should be the proudest woman in New York to think that Mr. Samara had paid me a visit. If we could only fix up that dinner!"

Gabriel Samara was a little weary. His glance was straying through the windows to the sunlit streets. The close atmosphere of the lounge, the heavy perfumes, the din of conversation were beginning to nauseate him.

"I have a call to make in the hotel, Miss Borans," he reminded her. "If you and Mrs. — Mrs. Bossington, I believe — will excuse me, I will take my leave. The Ambassador from my country is expecting me at half-past two."

His would-be hostess gripped him by the arm.

"Not one step do you move from here," she insisted, "until you have promised to come and see these good people to-night."

"So far as that is concerned," he replied, "I am in Miss Borans' hands. If it is her wish — if they are country people of mine who desire to meet me — I shall be charmed."

Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington had attained her object. She saw some friends to whom it was necessary that she should immediately communicate the fact that she had been discussing Russian politics with Mr. Gabriel Samara. With a little shower of farewells she departed. Catherine glanced up at her companion. There was something of mutual comprehension in their smile.

"It appears to be our fate to spend the evening together," he remarked.

"We shall see," she murmured. "Shall I expect you about four?"

"I shall not be later," he promised.

Samara watched his departing companion as she passed through the little throng of gossiping women on her way to the street. Amongst all this flamboyant elegance, these vivid splashes of colour and elaborate toilettes, there was something almost aloof in her still drabness — her disdain of all those freely displayed arts. Yet, so far as sheer femininity was concerned, Samara felt the spell of her so strongly that not one of the many attractive women by whom he was surrounded, several of whom looked at him with friendly curiosity, seemed in any way comparable to her. He watched her disappear and turned back into the hotel to keep an appointment with the Ambassador of his country, who had followed him from Washington the night before. His eagerness for the approaching discussion, however, had suddenly evaporated.

"I am, after all, a pagan," he muttered, as he stepped into the lift to make his call. "For the moment I had forgotten Russia."

CHAPTER VI

CATHERINE, on her return to Samara's suite at the Hotel Weltmore, found the sofa in the sitting room occupied by a young man who stared at her with curious eyes as she entered. He was tall, phenomenally thin and phenomenally sallow. The hollows in his cheeks were so pronounced that the higher bones themselves seemed almost on the point of pushing their way through the flesh. His coal-black hair was long and dishevelled, and his unshaven condition added to the wildness of his appearance. Catherine, with the instinct of her sex, took note only of his obvious ill health, and her tone as she addressed him was kindly.

"You must be Andrew Kroupki, Mr. Samara's secretary," she said, removing the cover from her typewriter. "Mr. Samara scarcely expected that you would be well enough to get up to-day."

"I cannot lie in bed here," he declared feebly. "I become nervous. It is terrible to be ill so far from home. There is only Ivan, and Ivan hates me."

"Why should he do that?" she asked soothingly.

"Because he and I live closest to the Chief," was the impatient reply. "Ivan is jealous. He is very foolish. It is his strength which protects, and my brains. We are allies but he will not have it so. Have you been working for the Chief?"

"All the morning," she answered. "I still have a long list of invitations to decline. He is returning at four o'clock."

"Do you know anything about a despatch for Cherbourg?" he continued. "My brain was on fire this morning. I could not even ask."

"The despatch is finished and Mr. Samara took it away with him," she confided. "Part of it I typed and the more important part he wrote in by hand."

The young man closed his eyes for a moment.

"It is terrible to be like this," he groaned, "when one is needed."

She rose from her seat and came over to the couch, laid her hand for a moment upon his head and felt his pulse.

"Have you seen a doctor?" she enquired.

"Yes," he answered; "I am taking some medicine. He told me to lie in bed and let my brain rest."

"Would you like a drink? Some iced water?"

He made a little grimace.

"I hate it," he muttered. "In Russia we do not drink water."

She drew a phial of eau de Cologne from her bag, soaked her handkerchief with it and laid it upon his head.

"That is very pleasant," he sighed gratefully.

"I wonder," she suggested, "would you care for some tea — tea with lemon, freshly made and clear coloured?"

"Wonderful," he assented eagerly.

She sent for the floor waiter, procured some materials, and busied herself for a few minutes with the equipage which he brought. The young man sipped the beverage when she handed it to him with something approaching ecstasy.

"I have had nothing like this since the fever came," he told her. "What is your name?"

"Catherine Borans."

He looked at her with wide-open eyes. Already there was a gleam of something more than admiration in them.

"Where do you come from?" he asked.

"The Weltmore Typewriting Bureau downstairs," she replied. "Now try to go to sleep for a little time. Do you think that the sound of the typewriter will disturb you? If so, I will write some of these letters by hand. I do not think that Mr. Samara would mind."

He shook his head.

"It will not disturb me," he assured her. "I should like to lie here and watch you work. You are a very wonderful person. Are you an American?"

She smiled.

"You are not to talk any more," she enjoined. "Close your eyes and try to sleep."

"I like to watch you," he murmured.

Catherine was a person unafflicted with self-consciousness, so she continued her work methodically, although every time she looked up she found his eyes upon her.

"More tea," he begged once.

She gave him another cup, and renewed the eau de Cologne on her handkerchief. Presently he closed his eyes. When Samara returned he was sleeping peacefully.

"You didn't tell me that I was to be hospital nurse as well as typist," she remarked, speaking in an undertone.

Samara crossed the room and looked down at the young man.

"You've done very well with him," he said. "His respiration is better, the fever is down. What have you been giving him? Tea? It smells very good. I should like to try it myself."

She made some more and he drank it gratefully. He appeared a little tired; his interview had not been altogether satisfactory.

"You have the Russian touch for tea," he told her.

"There is nothing like it in the world. I drink wines and spirits — everything — but tea like this is better than all."

"And better for you," she observed.

"Sometimes its exhilaration is not rapid enough," he said.

The young man stirred in his place. His master's tone was suddenly kind as he turned towards him.

"You are feeling better, Andrew?" he asked in Russian.

"Much better," was the eager reply. "This young lady has been very good to me. Did you find her by accident, sir?"

"By accident," Samara assured him.

"She is intelligent?"

"She is adequate," was the expressionless reply. "I need your help, though, Andrew. Get well quickly."

"I am almost well now," the young man declared, sitting up. "In a few days I shall be able to do anything. It is fortunate for you, master," he went on, still speaking in his own language, "that you hate women."

"I do not hate them," Samara protested. "I simply do not appreciate them."

"You hate them," Andrew repeated emphatically. "Even when you play with them you show it in your manner. It is fortunate for you. This young lady might cause you trouble."

Samara glanced behind uneasily. Catherine was continuing her task with immovable face.

"I am going to take you to your room now, Andrew," he announced. "Your leaving it was against the doctor's orders."

"I am content," the young man assented. "I am very weary, but I feel sleep coming."

They crossed the room together, the young man leaning on Samara's arm. At the door he turned back.

"Thank you very much, miss," he said in English.

"Get well quickly," she enjoined, with a smile.

Samara returned a few minutes later. Catherine leaned back in her chair.

"Thank you for being kind to Andrew," he said.

"He seems delicate," she remarked.

"A little neurotic, and, I am afraid, consumptive," Samara agreed. "He is the son of one of my great friends, the man who first helped me fight against the anarchists. When he died I took the lad to work for me. He is able and devoted, but he has exaggerated ideas of everything. Your kindness has been good for him. He is already asleep."

"He is very devoted to you," she said.

"Almost foolishly so," he admitted. "There are times when I have trouble with him. Tell me now about these friends of yours. I see that I was right in my assumption. You and your companions are amongst those who hope for the impossible things."

"If I may, I will explain," Catherine suggested. "My mother died in this country when I was three years old and left as my patroness the exiled Grand Duchess Alexandrina, Sophia of Kossas. I have been brought up, therefore, indirectly attached to a strange little circle. Would you really like to know about them?"

"Most certainly," he assured her emphatically. "They are Russians."

"Very well, then," she continued. "There are six of them. We live in an apartment house a long way the other side of Central Park. We all share a sitting room for purposes of economy. Every one is poor,

every one is shabby, every one is miserable. Now, if you wish, I shall tell you about them, one by one."

"If you please," he murmured.

"First of all, then, there is Nicholas Imanoff," she began. "He is the nearest living descendant of the last Tzar. He is twenty-five years old, was educated with great difficulty at Harvard, and ekes out an embittered existence selling bonds on commission for a New York stock-broking firm. He calls himself Mr. Ronoff, but every one knows who he is, and I think it very probable that the little business he gets is because he appeals to people's curiosity. He is rather bad-tempered, does not take enough exercise, drinks a little more than is good for him, but is quite capable at times of justifying his descent."

"An admirable sketch," Samara declared. "Proceed, please."

"I will speak of my patroness, the Grand Duchess," Catherine continued. "She is a fair, fat old lady of sixty-eight. She dresses abominably, her walk is almost a waddle, she takes no care of her person, and she earns a few dollars a month by making artificial roses. She calls herself Mrs. Kossas."

"Less interesting," Samara commented. "Proceed."

"There is Boris Kirdorff," she went on. "Sometimes I believe he uses an obsolete title of 'Colonel.' I think that he has more brains than any of the others, and certainly less conscience. He comes from a great family, as I dare say you know. His is a cold, unattractive personality, but he is a born schemer and if ever the others have hopes it is through him they are expressed. He is secretary to a very *bourgeois* card club, but I think the greater part of his small earnings is spent in gambling.

"General Orenburg is a more pleasing personality,

but he is older. He is the only one who has any money and that is a very small amount. He puts it into the common stock. He spends his whole day at the libraries, and he has fifteen different schemes for bringing about a monarchist rising in Russia."

"Any other young people?" Samara enquired.

"There is Cyril Volynia Sabaroff of Perm and his sister, Rosa. Cyril is interested in the sale of automobiles. His income varies a great deal, though. Rosa is engaged as reception clerk at a photographer's shop. They are less serious than the rest of us, and, if only they had money, I think they would be content to stay in this country for the remainder of their days. The others of us, as you may have gathered, have only one desire in life, and that is to return to Russia."

"Why not?" Samara observed. "You are all Russians. You have a perfect right to live in your native land."

There was a moment's silence. Catherine was gazing across the top of her typewriter at her companion. Samara was lounging on the other end of the table, his hands in his pockets, a cigar which he had lighted, without remark, between his lips.

"You seem to forget," she said quietly, "that there is such a thing as a decree of banishment against the absentee aristocracy of Russia."

"Rubbish!" he exclaimed. "Out of date! Antediluvian! I'll revoke it the day I get back. You can consider it revoked now. Mind you," he went on, striking the table a mighty blow with his fist, "there is another decree in Russia which will never be suspended. It is my aim to make Russia the freest country in the world, but if I find an anarchist in café, street or public meeting, he is shot within the hour. Against anarchists the law of Russia is as the law against vermin — death;

summary, unquestionable! There is no one else calling himself a Russian who is not welcome to take his place amongst the community."

"Will you repeat this to my friends?" she asked, and there was very nearly a tremor in her tone.

"Take me to them," he invited.

"I shall call for you at nine o'clock," she promised. "Please let us work now. I feel that I am wasting your time."

It was a dejected, almost a pathetic little crowd gathered round the sparsely laid dinner table in a back apartment of the Amsterdam Avenue Private Hotel. The furniture, the table appointments, the faded carpet upon the floor were all according to type. The prospect from the solitary window was of brick and masonry and a jumble of telegraph wires. Occasionally the room shook with the thunder of an elevated train passing near by. A coloured servant, whose dress seemed to have been put on in scraps, was serving the meal from the sideboard. There were two jugs of water and a carafe of light beer upon the table; in its centre a little vase with a handful of cheap flowers. General Orenburg sat at one end and Alexandrina of Kossas at the other. Conversation was intermittent. They all appeared to be engrossed in their own thoughts.

"Catherine is late to-day," Alexandrina observed.

"Catherine is late but here," the young lady in question remarked, opening the door in time to hear the sound of her own name.

They all looked at her with interest. She seemed somehow or other to represent the vitality of the little circle, which brightened visibly at her coming. Kirdorff, whom nothing in this world escaped, watched her curiously, as she took her place. His was a queer,

hawklike face with black eyes and indrawn lips. His hair, thin about the temples and carefully brushed, was unexpectedly light-coloured.

"Catherine has something to tell us," he observed.

"I have something very wonderful to tell you," Catherine confessed, as she pushed aside a bowl of very unappetising soup. "You need not bother about my dinner. I lunched at the Ritz Carlton, and I shall eat a great many of Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington's sandwiches later on. Listen to me, everybody. Of all men in this world, with whom do you think I lunched? It is absurd to ask you to guess. I lunched with Gabriel Samara!"

A thunderbolt through the roof could have scarcely created a greater sensation. There were exclamations in every key. Then, with the passing of that first wave of astonishment, came a fierce and intense interest. Kirdorff leaned across the table, his fists clenched, his eyes protuberant. The Grand Duchess talked to herself in broken sentences. Nicholas Imanoff spoke.

"How came you to meet Samara?" he demanded.

"In the most natural way possible," Catherine explained. "He telephoned to the Bureau for a typist — his secretary has been taken ill. The assignment was given to me. My work pleased him. He invited me to lunch."

"You lunched with that man!" Nicholas muttered.

"There are very few men I wouldn't lunch with at the Ritz Carlton," Catherine rejoined coolly, "but I will tell you this now of Gabriel Samara. He stands for other principles than ours, but he is a man. He is what Cyril Volynia here, when he came back from England, called a 'sportsman.' We met Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington, and she spoke of to-night. Samara asked me who my Russian friends were, and I told him. Then listen to what he said. 'They are Russians. Why do

they live in New York? Why do they not go back to Russia?'"

"Samara said that!" Kirdorff intervened.

"Absolutely!" Catherine continued. "I reminded him of the decree of banishment. He scoffed at it. He undertook that it should be revoked. He has told me in plain words that you are all of you free to return to Russia."

There was an almost awed silence. Alexandrina was sobbing quietly into her handkerchief. Kirdorff was drumming upon the table.

"Free to return!" he muttered. "Why not? If one could only breathe there — could live ——"

"Or die," General Orenburg interrupted fervently, "so long as it was in Russia!"

"There is surely a living to be made there as well as here," Cyril Volynia declared. "Perhaps my firm would let me open a branch depot at Moscow."

"Listen," Catherine warned them, "you must make up your minds to this. It is necessary and it may lead to great things. You must meet Samara."

The Grand Duchess left off sobbing. The suggestion was so astounding that the words themselves seemed to convey no definite meaning to her.

"Meet Samara!" Kirdorff reflected. "He will want to know our attitude towards his Government, of course. He will require pledges."

"I have not the faintest idea what he will say to you," Catherine observed. "I can only tell you this. He is a brave man. He is rash. He is broad-minded. He is ingenuous. He does not in the least resemble one's idea of a democratic leader."

Nicholas Imanoff looked across the table. There was a note of covert jealousy in his tone.

"Does he know who you are?" he asked.

"He does not, and I desire that he should not know," she rejoined. "I have spoken of Alexandrina of Kossas as my patroness."

"Tell us this," Kirdorff asked quietly, the instincts of the conspirator already stirring within him. "In the course of your work to-day did you come to any conclusion as to the success or failure of his mission over here? Have you formed any idea as to how far he means to go with this mad scheme of his?"

"We will talk of that later," Catherine replied. "It is better for you to know nothing to-night. What I want you all to remember now is that in half an hour's time we leave here to hold one of our formal meetings under the roof and patronage of Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington."

"You are coming with us, Catherine?" the Grand Duchess demanded.

"I am going back to the hotel to fetch Mr. Samara," was the unexpected rejoinder.

Nicholas half rose to his feet.

"I will escort you," he declared.

Catherine smiled at him coldly.

"You will do nothing of the sort, Nicholas," she said. "If you take my advice, you will remember what I say. So far as Gabriel Samara knows, I am a typist from the Weltmore Secretarial Bureau. It is my wish that he knows no more than this. Kindly remember that."

Kirdorff nodded approvingly.

"Our little sister knows best," he pronounced.

CHAPTER VII

Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington dispensed hospitality in a Fifth Avenue palace, built by a multimillionaire of world-wide fame and purchased by her obedient spouse at the time of the last oil combine. She entertained lavishly and indiscriminately. Society, diplomacy, and even artists were all alike welcome. Her peculiar fancy, however, was acting as hostess to what she was endeavouring to make known in New York as the "Russian Circle."

"My dear Saxon," she explained to her husband, "no one knows who these people are. All we do know is that they are aristocrats. There's the Grand Duchess, of course, and the General, and Colonel Kirdorff — they are the bluest blood in Russia, but those others aren't pulling the wool over my eyes, though they call themselves plain 'Mr.' and 'Mrs.' and 'Miss.' It's my belief there's more of the Royal Family than one in that little crowd. And Saxon — there's Prince Nicholas now, an Imanoff ——"

"What is an 'Imanoff,' anyway?" Mr. Bossington interrupted, giving his coat tails a pull.

"The family name of the Russian Royal Family," his wife declared in a tone of awe.

Mr. Bossington appeared unimpressed.

"Thought they were all wiped out in a cellar or somewheres," he objected.

"All the direct branch were assassinated — murdered," his wife agreed, "in a cellar. The details were too horrible. Some of the others, however, got away, and one or two escaped out of the country. Prince

Nicholas is the next heir to the throne of those left alive."

"Well, there isn't going to be any throne," Mr. Bossington observed. "Russia's doing thundering well under her new Republic. That fellow Samara has set her going again. I had an offer for some oil concessions from his Government to-day, made me through Washington. I shall have to send a man over next week."

Mrs. Bossington deemed that the time had come for her great announcement.

"Saxon," she said, "to-night I want you to be at your best. Gabriel Samara, the greatest man in Russia, is coming here."

"You don't say!" Mr. Bossington exclaimed, properly impressed at last. "Does he know anything about oil, I wonder?"

"You can cut out that stuff," his wife enjoined angrily, with a brief relapse into the verbiage of past years. "What I mean, Saxon, is that I want you to be the perfect gentleman to-night — the broad-minded American host. We may get asked to Russia. Come right along into the library now. They'll be here before we know where we are."

"What I want to know," Mr. Bossington demanded, as they crossed the hall, "is how our friends and this man, Samara, are likely to pull together, and where on earth did you come across him?"

A butler in command motioned to a footman, who threw open the door of a magnificent library. It was an apartment which much resembled the interior of a chapel, with vaulted roof, stained-glass windows, and an organ in the far end. There were divans and chairs, a round table at which a score of places were set, and a sideboard, groaning with edibles of every sort, flanked

by a long row of gold-foiled bottles. Mrs. Bossington looked around her critically.

"I guess this is cosy enough for them, Saxon," she observed.

"There's plenty of the stuff, anyway," he remarked, with a glance towards the sideboard. "But what I want to know is how did you get hold of this fellow Samara? Those others all seem as if they had stepped out of a dime show, but Samara's the real goods! — as big a man, in his way, as our President!"

"I met him with that little Catherine Borans, the typewriting girl, lunching at the Ritz Carlton," Mrs. Bossington explained. "Of course it's all stuff and nonsense about her being really a working girl. There isn't one of them has a better air than she has. They are close-mouthed and all," she went on, listening for the bell. "I tried to get the old General, the other day, to tell me who she was. He just smiled and shook his head. The Duchess seemed on the point of telling me and then she pulled herself up. 'She is of our order, Mrs. Bossington,' was all I could get her to say."

The door was suddenly thrown open. The little stream of expected guests began to arrive; a curious company in their way, but each with his own peculiar claim to distinction. General Orenburg, who first bent over his hostess' hand, was ponderous and bulky, his shabby dinner clothes carefully brushed, the ends of his black tie a little shiny. Nevertheless he bore himself as a man with a great past should. He was accompanied by Prince Nicholas, whose irritation had departed for the evening, but whose manner was still stiff and abstracted. The Grand Duchess entered the room directly afterwards. She had changed her gown since dinner time and her hair was parted and brushed so smoothly back that it seemed almost like a plastered wig. Cyril

Volynia Sabaroff of Perm followed, with his sister Rosa. Behind them came Colonel Kirdorff. They all stood in little groups whilst a footman served coffee and liqueurs. Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington flitted from one to the other, with much to say concerning their expected guest. Her husband listened to the description of a new automobile which some friends of Cyril Sabaroff were soon to put on the market.

"If this isn't too sweet to see you all together!" their hostess exclaimed. "Now I do hope you'll make yourselves comfortable and have your little chat just as though no one were here. There's a table you can sit round and a bite of supper for you later on. I hope you gentlemen will pay a visit to the sideboard whenever you like."

Prince Nicholas detached himself from the others.

"Your hospitality is wonderful, madam," he declared. "We beg that you will not leave us. Colonel Kirdorff has promised to talk to us to-night about the probable result of the Samara type of government and the General has a few remarks to make about these rumours of demilitarisation in Russia."

"Very interesting, I'm sure," Mrs. Bossington murmured, sailing away to greet some fresh arrivals — an elderly professor and his wife.

"Will Samara back out, do you think?" General Orenburg asked his neighbour anxiously.

Kirdorff shook his head.

"If he promised, he will come," he declared confidently. "I have that much faith in him, at any rate. He is not likely to break his word."

The greater part of the little company was now assembled. They were about a dozen outside the circle of Catherine's immediate entourage; all Russians and ardent Monarchists, but of various types and positions

in the world. They were barely settled in their places round the table, when the eagerly expected event happened. The door was opened and the butler made his announcement.

"Miss Catherine Borans — Mr. Gabriel Samara!"

The newcomers advanced towards their hostess. They exchanged a few words of salutation whilst Samara bowed low and raised her somewhat pudgy fingers to his lips. Then Catherine led him towards the table.

"Please, all of you," she said, "I have ventured to bring a visitor to see you. We have been very curious about him, very critical, sometimes censorious. After all, though, we must remember that he is a fellow countryman."

There followed a few moments of intense silence. They were all engrossed in their study of this man, the foremost figure of their country; the man who, from their somewhat narrow point of view, stood between them and their desire. Certainly so far as appearance went he was at a disadvantage with none of them. He was well groomed, his evening clothes were impeccable and he possessed to the fullest extent the natural dignity of a man holding a great place in the world.

"Samara! Gabriel Samara," Alexandrina murmured, looking at him through her lorgnettes.

"Samara!" the fair-haired Rosa Sabaroff exclaimed, looking at him with undisguised awe.

"Gabriel Samara!" the General said, under his breath, stiffening insensibly.

The attitude of the little gathering towards their visitor could scarcely be called hospitable. The General and Prince Nicholas both inclined their heads, but did not offer their hands. Samara, however, showed no signs of taking offence. His bow to Alexandrina had been the bow of a courtier. He was himself too inter-

ested in his own contemplation of the rest of the party to appreciate their lack of cordiality. Mr. Bossington, as though he judged the moment propitious, introduced himself into the circle.

"Mr. Samara," he said, "glad to meet you, sir. Saxon Bossington, my name — glad to be your host. There's a proposition about oil they were asking me to look into, somewhere north of the Caspian Sea."

Samara smiled.

"You are without doubt, sir, one of the capitalists whom your President mentioned to me," he rejoined politely. "Russia has need of your brains and your money. We think that we can repay all that you have to offer. Our greatest necessity just now is to find employment for a large number of men."

"You are really going to demilitarise then!" Colonel Kirdorff intervened.

Samara, who had been standing a few feet apart, turned once more towards the table.

"You seem to be all my country people," he observed. "Why should I have secrets from you? It is my intention immediately on my return to Russia to demobilise the whole of our Third Army, consisting of about a million men. I should have done so before if I could have been sure of finding employment for them. My mission over here was to arrange something of the sort."

"What about the Germans?" Prince Nicholas demanded bluntly.

Some part of the geniality seemed to depart from Samara's manner. There was a note almost of hauteur in his reply.

"The armies of Russia," he said, "have been trained by and perhaps learned their vocation partly from German officers. Those German officers have been well

paid for their labours. For anything else, the army consists of Russian soldiers, bound together for one purpose, and one purpose only — the defence of their country. In my opinion and in the opinion of my counsellors, the necessity for their existence on so large a scale no longer exists."

Samara was still standing. The General rose to his feet and indicated a chair.

"Will you join us, sir?" he invited.

There was a breathless pause — the remainder of the handful of Monarchists sat spellbound. With a grave bow to the General, Samara accepted the invitation. Prince Nicholas was on his left, the Grand Duchess a little lower down.

"This is a strange day," the General continued. "We never thought to welcome amongst us the head of the Russian Republic. I and my friends, Mr. Samara, represent a broken party; yet a party which has yielded everything except hope. We do not desire to begin our acquaintance under the shadow of any false pretence. Prince Nicholas of Imanoff here, we acknowledge as the hereditary ruler of Russia. We cannot recognise any other government."

Samara bowed his head.

"You have every right to your convictions," he admitted. "If I believed that it was for the good of Russia once more to enter upon a period of Tzardom, I should myself immediately accept the monarchical doctrine. But I tell you frankly that I do not believe it. I am a Russian by birth and descent and I think that I have earned the right to call myself a patriot. I have worked — I still work — for my country's good as I see it. That is why, with a clear conscience, I have accepted this invitation to come and visit you."

"Our friend speaks well," the General declared, look-

ing around him. "After all, we must not forget that he has accomplished a great deed. He has freed Russia from the Bolshevists, he has destroyed Soviet rule. If the form of government which he has set up does not wholly appeal to us, it is still a million times better than the one which he has crushed."

"That is common sense," Kirdorff agreed. "Yet it leaves us with this reflection. Bolshevism and Soviet rule were impossibilities. From that hateful extreme we expected the swing of the pendulum back to the conditions of our desire. Samara here has intervened. He has intervened — happily, perhaps, for Russia — but disastrously for us. While he lives our cause will languish."

There was a tense silence. The significance of those words "while he lives" seemed to make itself felt everywhere. Samara looked around with a faint smile upon his lips — a smile about which there was already a shadow of defiance. It was a strange scene: the eager faces of the little crowd gathered round the table, the wonderful room with its great spaces and unexpected flashes of almost barbaric magnificence, the lavish hospitality displayed upon the huge sideboard, Mr. and Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington, almost grotesque in their position of host and hostess, seated in the background, waiting.

"A true accusation," Samara admitted. "But after all I can honestly assure you that I, who know the temper of the country personally better than you can by the offices of correspondents, have seen few indications of a desire on the part of the people to submit themselves once more to the domination of a monarchy. I had no idea until a few hours ago that I was to have the honour of meeting you this evening — you, Prince Nicholas, or you, General, whose name is still remem-

bered in Russia, or you, Colonel, or your Royal Highness. Let me say this to you, if I may. The Bolshevist days and the days of insane hatreds are over. Russia is a free country — as free to you as to me. Why not come back and live in it?"

"Come back!" the General groaned. "My estates ——"

"My mines!" Kirdorff muttered.

"They took from me five hundred thousand English pounds," Alexandrina sighed wearily.

"I will be frank with you all," Samara continued. "There is a new code of laws in Russia to-day. We are prospering to an amazing extent, but we have taken upon our shoulders an immense burden. The Russia of to-day desires to pay the debts of the past. If I alone had power, I would add to those debts the sums and estates of which the Bolshevists deprived you. But in that desire I am almost alone. I spoke of it and my own people listened in silence. But I believe — I believe from the bottom of my heart — that the day will come when Russia will repay you every farthing which you have lost."

"If one could dream of such a thing!" the General faltered.

"My mines are being worked by a Japanese Company," Kirdorff sighed.

"There will be difficulties," Samara admitted, "but we shall overcome them. In the meantime, why live in exile? Russia is your country. Russia is open to you. I am not afraid to invite you all freely and whole-heartedly to return; the sentence of banishment against absentee Monarchists, I promise you shall be revoked. I am not afraid of your influence. If Russia, at any time, should want a monarchy, let her have it. I will buy a villa in the south of France, be myself an exile, and

grow roses. I am but the servant of the will of the people."

"Rienzi said that before he climbed over their shoulders into power," Kirdorff reminded him, with a curious flash in his eyes.

"Rienzi was a man of more ambitious temperament than I," Samara retorted. "Besides, his scheme of government in those days was less wide-flung. He was a dreamer as well as an idealist; I am a practical man. I desire what is good for Russia, and it is certainly not for her good that any of those who might be foremost amongst her citizens are living in exile. General, return to Russia and an Army Corps or a post at the War Office is yours. You, Colonel Kirdorff, shall have a division whenever you choose to apply for it. There is not one of you who shall be deprived of the opportunity of doing useful work for your country. Why sit here and weave impossible dreams? Why not attune your patriotism to the music of real labour?"

"What about me?" Nicholas asked eagerly.

Samara reflected for a moment.

"Prince," he confided, "I will be frank with you. We are living too near the shadow of regrettable days. Come if you will and be sure of my protection, so far as it goes. You shall have a commission in the army, but an Imanoff in Russia, even to-day, must take his chance."

Nicholas nodded. Catherine, who had moved round to his side, looked across at Samara.

"Remember this," she insisted. "If the tide of feeling should flow, at any time, towards the reëstablishment of Russia's real ruler, it is upon Nicholas here that the people's choice must fall."

Samara listened indifferently. Perhaps in that hour of his magnificent and superabundant vitality, when his

brain was at its zenith, his vision unerring, the idea of any serious rivalry between himself and this pale-faced young man of peevish expression seemed an incredible thing.

"All I can say is," he replied, "that if Prince Nicholas cares to come, he is welcome. Such protection as I can afford him he shall have. If he plots against my Government and his plots are discovered, he will be shot. If, by open election of the people or by vote of the Duma, a monarchy is desired, then I shall never lift a hand against him."

The General stroked his grey imperial. Something of the weariness had gone from his face. Something of the languor, indeed, seemed to have passed from all of them. They had listened to a wonderful message. Samara read their thoughts. He rose to his feet.

"I thank you, General, and all of you for your reception. I fear that in the past you have counted me an enemy. Wipe that out, please. The greatest of possible ties binds us together — our country!"

He bowed low and moved away. Mrs. Bossington arose from her chair and came bustling towards him.

"Now, my dear Mr. Samara," she exclaimed, "I am sure all this talking must have tired you. What it's been about neither Saxon nor I have the slightest idea, for on an occasion like this we make it a rule to keep ourselves to ourselves. One thing, however, I insist upon, you must take a little refreshment before you go."

Samara suffered himself to be piloted by his hostess to the sideboard, ate pâté sandwiches and drank champagne. Presently they were joined by her husband, who was curious about the oil-producing centres of Southern Russia. From the table behind came a drone of subdued but eager voices.

CHAPTER VIII

Miss Sadie Loyes set down the telephone receiver upon the instrument with a little bang. She was obviously annoyed.

"Miss Borans," she announced sharply, "eleven hundred and eighty wants you again. Keep a record of your time."

Catherine rose to her feet and placed the cover on her machine. Miss Loyes watched her with critical eyes.

"Crazy about you, seemingly," she continued. "They're making such a fuss about him in the papers this morning, I thought I'd go up myself for an hour or so. Knows his own mind, anyhow — you or nobody. What kind of work is it?"

"Not work you'd enjoy very much, I think, Miss Loyes," Catherine replied, smiling faintly as she thought of the previous morning, "correspondence and documents and that sort of thing. Yesterday afternoon Mr. Bromley Pride interviewed him for the *New York Comet*. He didn't get much of a story, though."

"These foreigners leave me cold," the manageress declared. "What we Americans make such a fuss about them for I don't know. They just come over here for what they can get. One of the papers this morning said that this Mr. Samara has fixed up a loan with the President of something like two hundred millions. Keep your time card carefully, Miss Borans. There's one thing about these Russians, they aren't mean!"

Catherine descended the stairs into the hall and made leisurely progress towards the lift. On the way the fancy seized her to call in at the florist's shop and buy a single dark red rose which she pulled through the

waistband of her dress. The elevator man, who had scarcely noticed her before, watched her disappearing figure with undisguised admiration.

"She sure is some girl, that!" he remarked to one of the messenger boys, as he stepped back into the elevator.

The young lady seated behind the desk at the entrance to the corridor wished her good morning with a faint air of surprise. She called to her associate at the other end of the place and motioned after Catherine.

"Did you see that pale-faced ninny from the typing room, all dolled out, this morning?" she demanded. "She's got a beau all right. I never noticed that she was so stylish."

It was a very different sitting room which Catherine presently entered. There were half a dozen men present and conversation was a little vehement. At her entrance it subsided. Samara motioned her to a chair at the smaller table and proceeded to dismiss his callers.

"I agree," he said. "It seems cowardly but perhaps you are right. At one o'clock Carloss, and at three o'clock the bank president. Louden can make all the arrangements. He had better bring an automobile here and cable Cherbourg."

They drifted away, one by one. Samara himself escorting them through the little hall to the door. Presently he returned and threw himself into an easy-chair.

"Trouble at home, here, and everywhere," he remarked grimly. "I've got to hurry home."

"About your demilitarisation scheme?" she enquired.

"Half the unrest is owing to German influence," he answered, with a nod. "We've had so many commitments to her in the past that she's grown to look upon these armies as her own. Our people over here are

quite right, though. I must get back at once and make a tour through the military district. In the meantime, I am going to cable over a proclamation. Ready? "

"Quite," she answered.

He dictated rapidly for half an hour or more. As soon as he had finished he went to a cupboard in which was an array of bottles, mixed himself a drink and tossed it off. Then he sat in his easy-chair with his hands in his pockets and a frown upon his forehead, while she gathered up the loose pages of her work.

"Tell me," he asked abruptly, "what did your friends think of me last night? "

"They were surprised," she admitted.

"Favourably or unfavourably? "

"On the whole favourably. Your offer to them all has made a great stir in their quiet lives."

"It was a serious one," he declared, rising to his feet and pacing the room. "There is no reason why they shouldn't come back. I have nothing against the Monarchists so long as they accept the situation and desist from plots. The people against whom I wage war to the death are the anarchists. They are a waning force but I have not done with them yet. I am a humane man but I would kill an anarchist as I would a fly, because of the poison they carry with them."

She looked at him thoughtfully, but she made no remark. Presently he stopped in front of her chair.

"Don't you agree with me — I mean about your people? " he demanded. "Don't you think I was right to ask them to come back? They are, after all, Russian citizens."

"I think you were right," she replied, "with one exception."

"One exception? " he repeated.

"Nicholas Imanoff. If you allow him to return, I don't think I should have him in the army. You know what the Russian peasant soldier is. Communism is a meaningless cry to him, although he may shout for it if he is bidden. God and the Tzar are still in his blood."

"You are giving me advice against your own people!" he exclaimed suddenly.

The faintest tinge of colour stole for a moment under the creamy pallor of her cheeks. The same idea had flashed in upon her.

"I am tired of plots and rebellions," she explained. "Changes of government should be worked out by the will of the people. If the people call for a Tzar — well, there is Nicholas. But if he is once in the army, there will be plots. It isn't for our own good. I should like to see the monarchy reëstablished, but I should like to see it reëstablished by orthodox means."

"You tell me that Alexandrina of Kossas is your patroness," he said. "Does that mean that you too are an aristocrat?"

"By inclination," she confessed. "You must remember that it is not only the aristocracy who would support monarchy. I am one of those who consider it the sanest form of government. Would you like me to do anything with this proclamation?"

He took the sheets from her and glanced them through, made a few alterations in pencil, and laid them down again. Afterwards he resumed his restless perambulation of the room. She leaned back in her chair and waited. Samara was evidently disturbed. Occasionally he muttered to himself. Once he stood for quite five minutes gazing out of the window, down into the windy, sunlit streets.

"I am sailing this afternoon, Miss Borans," he announced, suddenly turning round. "My people are all

emphatic and they are right. There is danger here and trouble to face at home."

She did not attempt to conceal her interest.

"I read your interview in the *New York Comet*, this morning," she said, "but after all it told us very little. As the General was saying last night, you are still outside the Pact of Nations. You can demobilise the whole of these first million men and still remain, on paper at any rate, the greatest military power in Europe."

"I could," he assented. "But that is not my intention. I want my Russian people back on the land instead of behind the guns, and I'm going to have them there. That's all I can say. Later on I have a scheme of my own for a citizen army — the only sort of army any country ought to have. Miss Borans, will you go back to Russia with me?"

"Will I do *what?*" she asked, looking at him intently.

"Precisely what I have asked," he persisted. "What relatives have you here?"

"A sort of aunt," she replied, "and a second cousin."

"Good! You work now for the management of this hotel. Work for me instead. I need a secretary like you. If your friends accept my offer, you'll have company over there. You won't clash with Andrew. He has his own line of work."

She shook her head.

"I could not work for you, Mr. Samara," she said.

"Why not?" he demanded roughly. "You are a Russian patriot. So am I."

"Our ideas of patriotism might not be the same," she pointed out. "If there were a movement in favour of the reëstablishment of the monarchy in Russia, for instance, I should join it."

"Join it and welcome," he answered. "I'm not at

all sure that you would, though, if you were on the spot. Russia to-day is leaping onward towards prosperity. I can prove that to you. What do you want a monarchy back for? Not for the sake of the Russian people. They'd be no better off. Who are you for, Miss Borans — the people or one particular class? "

"That one particular class is a section of the people," she reminded him.

"An infinitesimal one," he scoffed. "Majorities count. You must work for the good of the greatest number."

"All the same," she said, "I am not disposed to be your secretary."

His face darkened almost into a scowl.

"Don't be absurd!" he protested angrily. "It's a good offer. You can name your own salary in reason. You would be able to live in your native country instead of being an exile."

She shook her head.

"It is an impossibility," she assured him.

He glared at her for a moment furiously. Then, without further reference to it, he abandoned the subject.

"Take down these letters," he directed. "Take copies but be sure you give them to me."

"I am quite ready," she murmured.

He dictated for an hour. When he had finished, he read the letters she handed him with almost meticulous care, signed them and watched her as she placed them in their envelopes. Then he took the copies, looked them through and locked them up in a despatch box.

"How is Mr. Andrew Kroupki this morning?" she enquired.

"Better," he answered shortly. "He will not be able to travel with me, though. It is most annoying."

She glanced at the clock.

"What time does your boat sail?" she asked.

"Eight o'clock," he told her, "but I am going on board at six. It seems that although the police released our friend of yesterday morning, a hint or two of what he was after got about. I'm practically being smuggled out of the country."

"You have appointments at one o'clock and three," she reminded him. "Is there anything more that I can do for you before I leave?"

"There is only one thing you could do for me, and you won't do it," he growled. "I'm not a woman's man and I never learned how to talk to them, but you're the sort of human being it does one good to work with. I believe in you. You could help me."

"There are many others who could do that," she assured him.

"I don't meet them," he answered. "My biographers have written a lot of nonsense about me. Because I have swept clean the roads of life and driven the masses along the appointed way, they talk about my magnetism, my intense sympathy with human beings. It's all rubbish! I have no sympathy. Men and women are mostly puppets to me and life is a chess-board. If I could find some one who would teach me tolerance, some one whom I could trust, for whom I could feel human things, I could accomplish greater deeds than I have ever accomplished yet. There are times when I am frightened of my own materialism. I have thought all my life universally, in composite blocks. The world is becoming like a doll's house to me. I have a fancy that you might be able to change this. Will you come and try?"

Again she shook her head. "It is an impossibility," she repeated.

"That ends it, then!" he pronounced abruptly. "Tell your people to send an account for the typing in to the hotel. The Embassy are arranging to pay my bill after my departure. All the evening papers are announcing that I leave on Saturday. You will perhaps consider what I have told you concerning my movements as confidential."

"I will remember," she promised.

She rose to her feet. He glowered across the room at her.

"Some day," he concluded, "you may see that you've wasted a great opportunity. No woman ever had a greater. You've read of me and my work but you don't know. When I crushed Bolshevism, the heart and soul of Russia began to beat again. The work's only begun. You and your little monarchist plots! Why don't you lift your head and see the greater things? You could help."

"I am very sorry," she sighed, as she turned away.

He heard the door close. Then he crossed the room towards the cupboard. Help in his task from any human being seemed to be the one thing in life always denied him.

CHAPTER IX

THEY were all gone at last. Samara was alone in his capacious stateroom with a single companion — Bromley Pride, the *bona fide* representative of the *New York Comet*. Samara listened to the receding footsteps with a frown. Outside was turmoil. The bugle had just sounded the last call for departing visitors.

"This sort of thing," he declared, "would soon drive me mad."

Bromley Pride smiled tolerantly. He was a largely made, athletic-looking man, clean-shaven and forcible. In New York he was considered to be an authority on Russian affairs.

"I am afraid these last two hours have seemed rather like an anti-climax," he observed. "All the same, I am convinced that precautions were necessary. The Chief of the Police sent for me himself this morning and begged me, if I had any influence with you, to persuade you to leave the country without delay. There are all sorts of rumours about."

"They warned me in Washington," Samara acknowledged gloomily, "and of course there was yesterday's little affair."

"Yesterday's little affair," Bromley Pride repeated with emphasis, "was only the beginning. I honestly believe," he went on, "that the Germans, over here at any rate, look upon the proposed demobilisation of your armies as an act of absolute treachery to them. You don't read the New York papers, I suppose, but the German-owned ones have passionate articles this morning, denouncing your visit here and attacking your whole policy. Whatever one can find to say against the

Germans they are not cowards. Five years ago you were a little god in Germany. To-day you have about forty million enemies."

Samara nodded with darkening expression.

"You're right, of course, Pride," he admitted, "but my progress from the Hotel Weltmore to the boat was more like the passage of one of those hated plutocrats of old through the dangerous part of his capital than the departure of one who has brought freedom to a great country from the city which has canonised that particular quality. Twenty plain clothes policemen walking along the customs shed and me in the middle! A sickening sight!"

"If it had been Saturday instead of to-day," Pride observed, "the chances are ten to one you'd have had a bomb in the midst of the lot of you."

There was the sound of cheering, a sense of gliding motion, the screaming and panting of tugs. Samara drew a breath of relief.

"Well, thank God we're off!" he exclaimed. "Can I go on deck now and get a breath of fresh air?"

"Not yet," the other begged. "Two detectives from police headquarters are going through the passenger list with the purser now. As soon as they send me word down 'O. K.' you can do what you like. You must remember that you haven't told me much yet, sir. I'm not only a New York journalist, you know — I'm a friend of Russia."

"My mission was a success," Samara declared. "That's all there is to be said about it. My task lies ahead. Forty years ago, Russia — the best part of Russia — was trying to drill the military spirit into Russian peasants. To-day I have got to knock it out. The Bolshevists were wise people in their generation. They kept a great army going without the slightest

difficulty. The soldiers were fed whilst the peasants starved. Who wanted to work on the land, without enough to keep body and soul together, when there was good food and wine and beer in the army? They're an obstinate race, our peasants, you know, Pride. I've got the capital now to make them productive units of the nation, at work in the factories and fields, and to pay them good money. It's quite another matter to make them see that it's for their benefit, though. That is where the difficulty may come in."

"You'll do it in the end," Pride prophesied hopefully. "You've achieved greater impossibilities."

"Yes, I shall do it," Samara assented. "I shall do it, if only they'll let me alone. I shall do it if I can keep intrigue out of the Duma and the Press and the Army. I shall do it if I'm given a fair show."

Pride was gazing out of the porthole at the passing panorama of docks and walls.

"One would pray for you, Samara, if one knew how or to whom. There's a soul in your work — something that reaches out of life — out of the mud of politics and man's ambition. The Jews are the only ones left who really pray. I rather wish you were a Jew, Samara."

"You think that I need faith."

"It isn't that, but you need an inexhaustible stock," was the quiet reply. "You have no one to depend upon but yourself. Russia has not produced a single great statesman yet to stand by your side. You carry on your shoulders a burden so enormous that it makes the hearts of us who watch grow faint. How must it be for yourself?"

Samara was looking into space. They were moving more rapidly now — moving all the time away from New York.

"I am forty-four years old, Pride," he confided. "I came into this fight when I was nineteen. I have never looked back. I have never relaxed or felt fear, but there has been one moment, and that not so long ago, when I almost weakened — if it is weakening to crave for help. I thought I saw something wonderful. It was just the mirage."

There was a knock at the door. A detective entered. He smiled the smile of a man who has accomplished good work.

"Everything 'O. K.' now, sir," he declared. "Mike's got 'em — one from Chicago, one from Washington. They've got the bracelets on and the guns are in Mike's pocket. They had a stateroom nearly opposite to you, too, sir," he added, turning to Samara.

"You think they were really after me?" the latter asked.

The detective laughed confidently.

"They were after some one on board, sir, and they had a plan of your stateroom. Not a paper between them, and scarcely any luggage. One's a Russian — a red-hot Bolshevist still, they say, whom we've had under observation for years. The other's a German. They won't trouble you any more, sir. As for the rest of the passengers, I think they're all right. The stewards and the crew, of course, we can't vouch for."

"Should I be running any grave risk," Samara enquired, "if I invited you to visit the smoking room with me?"

The detective accepted the idea with enthusiasm but ventured upon an amendment.

"I'd try that bell, sir, instead," he suggested, "and a word to the steward."

At last came the clanging of a bell which, this time,

brought them to a dead stop. Samara watched his visitors depart; Pride, with his cheerful carriage and buoyant air; the two detectives with their quarry; finally the pilot into his little rowboat on the other side. The great semicircle of lights had flashed out through the windy twilight. The freshness of the sea was a marvellous tonic after the spring lassitude of the town and the overheated rooms. Samara strode the deck with a sense of reawakening life in his veins. These croakers had gone. He was his own man again, free to muse upon his great achievement, to revel in the exhilaration of the voyage. Behind him lay New York — and what else? It was an absurdity, but he was heavy-hearted.

The clamorous dinner bugle left him undisturbed. His anticipations of the coming night, the long roll of the ship, the scent of the sea, and the wind upon his face elated him. And then, in the midst of his long, swinging walk, he came to a sudden standstill. A woman was leaning over the rail. He had passed her several times without notice. Now, something in her figure, the poise of her head, startled him with a flood of ridiculous memories. She turned and faced him. For once in his life, he, the man of many words, was speechless.

"You see, I changed my mind," she said, with a quiet smile. "I wish you'd go and see the purser about my stateroom."

They dined together half an hour later at the little table in a secluded corner of the saloon which Samara had bespoken for himself. Catherine was very frank.

"It has been the dream of my life to visit my own country," she confided, "but all the same I had not the faintest idea of accepting your offer. When I got downstairs after leaving you, I found Kirdorff waiting for

me. You may not realise it, but Colonel Kirdorff is a great schemer."

"You are to spy upon me!" he exclaimed.

"I rather think that is the idea," she assented. "You little know what you have brought upon yourself by your candour last night. They are all planning to return — even Nicholas. When I told Kirdorff of your offer, he thought that I should be mad to decline it. You mustn't be angry with them, Mr. Samara. They have lived away from their country a long time. They are getting old and the idea of intrigue stirs them as nothing else in life could. They are not to be ignored but they are scarcely to be feared."

"And you?" he asked. "Are you going to spy upon me?"

"I may," she admitted. "I shall make you no promises. I want to see what you have made of Russia. I want to travel about there and to talk to those people who understand. Maybe you will convert me. If you do not, I shall give you fair warning. In the meantime I hope you will find me plenty of work and pay me enough money to buy some clothes directly we land. These dear friends of mine all hurried me off with little more than a handbag."

"How is it that you are so intimate with all these people?" he enquired. "You are one of them, I suppose?"

"Don't ask me," she begged. "Let me remain a mystery. I am a working girl and I am going to be a very good secretary. Isn't that enough? Tell me, do you live in a palace at Moscow and what will become of me there?"

"I live in a portion of the old palace," he replied. "We call it now Government House. You can have your quarters there, or look after yourself outside,

whichever you like. Then you can also have an office in Government Buildings where Andrew does most of his work."

"It sounds delightful!" she declared. "We are impulsive people, you and I! You haven't had any references about me and as for you — well, I know that you are Gabriel Samara and that is all. I don't even know whether you are married."

He smiled.

"I think you do," he said. "In case I am wrong, I will tell you. I am unmarried and I have no women friends. As to references, I asked none from you; you must place a similar trust in me."

She returned his smile understandingly.

"I think," she confided, "that I have made up my mind to do that."

Catherine went to her stateroom early and Samara, after a brief visit to the smoking room, struggled out on to the rain-splashed deck. They were facing the Atlantic now, with a gale blowing, driving the spray in blinding sheets across the ship. He found a comparatively sheltered place where the thunder of the wind was heard rather than felt, and where he could watch the flecks of foam leap into the dazzling light and pass away into the black gulf beyond. He was on his way back, his mission accomplished; the second part of the great struggle of his life begun. There was never a time when he needed clearer vision, a more detached and concentrated grasp upon the great realities. Courage he had in plenty, even to rashness; his will no one had ever questioned; yet in the midst of his content he was troubled with a queer sense of some indeterminate quality in his thoughts, some disposition to find less than vitally important the great issues of life. His mental balance had been disturbed. Another element

had entered into the background of his sensations beside the joy of achievement. He filled his pipe and smoked savagely, staggered down the deck and took a stiff drink at the bar, came out again and crawled even farther towards the bows, until the music of the wind was in his ears like the crack of thunder and the hiss of the sea, as the waves were parted by the mighty bow of the ship, seemed like an unearthly scream. There were stars shining occasionally, shining here and there through a filmy lacing of clouds; a promise of the moon from behind the jagged pieces of black cloud, these latter so low down that it seemed as though the tall mast rising from the top of the sea was almost stabbing into their bosom. Gusts of rain swept into his face. The seamen who passed him were wrapped in oilskins and silent. The singing in his pulses continued, the exhilaration of spirit which he tried in vain to believe came from the knowledge that this journey of his, towards which the eyes of the world had been directed, had met with a success which he alone had prophesied.

And all the time he knew that there was something else, — another problem to be faced; a personal self creeping into life, demanding, nay, insisting upon recognition. It was all fancy, he told himself, born of the winds and the stars and the romance of travel. He suddenly realised upon what a trifle the whole great machinery of his mind had been engaged.

CHAPTER X

It was not until the middle of the next morning that Gabriel Samara appeared on deck. A long line of semi-somnolent passengers watched him with interest; Catherine, who was sipping some beef tea, looked up expectantly. He did not, however, pause in his promenade, but raised his hat slightly and passed on, his hands thrust into the pockets of his great coat, his underlip a little protruding, a general air of unapproachability about him. If there were not actually newspaper men on board, there were men connected with newspapers and they looked at him wistfully — even followed him at a respectful distance along the deck, seeking an opportunity to venture upon a friendly word. They were, however, doomed to disappointment. Samara, after a restless night, had no desire for the amenities of life. He climbed to the higher deck where few people were disposed to face the wind, and, assured of a certain measure of solitude there, he leaned against the rail, looking down into the steerage. Again as on the previous night, he felt the scrutiny of a little company of white-faced, black-eyed shadows of men, with skulking movements and general air of furtiveness. One of them he watched in particular, with something more than ordinary curiosity. The man looked over his shoulder twice and, although his expression was entirely passive, there was recognition in those stealthy glances. Soon he disappeared behind a ventilator, and Samara, after a few minutes' hesitation, recommenced his promenade. This time, however, it was speedily interrupted. The First Officer, who was descending from the bridge,

caught sight of him and waited for his approach at the bottom of the steps.

"Mr. Samara," he said, saluting, "may I have a word with you?"

Samara nodded.

"Certainly."

"We are very pleased and proud, of course, to have you as a passenger, sir," the officer went on, "but I wish very much you had followed the example of some other over-popular statesmen who travel with us, and done so incognito."

"My friends arranged my passage," Samara explained. "I came on board, as you know, quite unexpectedly."

"Just so," the other assented. "That would have been all right if they had used a little more discretion. The trouble of it is that we have at least a score of your country people in the steerage — red-hot Bolshevists, every one of them — who came out here and haven't been allowed to land. They've been at Ellis Island for some time and now we've orders to take them back to Naples."

"I think I've recognised one or two of them," Samara remarked drily.

"We are taking every precaution," the officer continued. "Not one of them will be allowed to land until after you have left the ship and we have stationed a guard at each of the communicating passages leading from the steerage aft. At the same time they are crafty fellows. I'd have a care if I were you, Mr. Samara, and particularly, I'd lock both my doors at night. Yours is rather an exposed suite."

"I am very much obliged for the warning," Samara said. "I don't think that my attitude towards life is exactly that of a fatalist, but so far as regards these

repeated attempts upon my person, I have grown just a little callous, I'm afraid. Or perhaps it is that I have faith."

"It's a fine thing to have," the other observed gravely, "but some of the greatest men in the world have been struck down by the most utter miscreants. We will do our best to take care of you, sir, you may be certain of that."

"I am sure you will," was the slightly more cordial reply.

The morning wore on. Some of the ship's passengers indulged in sports. Down in the steerage a man who called himself a Hungarian, but who had been christened "Simon the Jew," was doing tricks with knives, to the amazement of a little group of spectators. He pinned a piece of paper on the wall and from twenty paces he threw short-bladed, ugly-looking knives into a perfect circle. He threw them into the air and caught them by the handles, three or four at the same time, the sun shining upon the blue steel of their blades. Some of the women turned away. Even the men — and they were used to knives — shivered a little. The man was a magician.

Back on the promenade deck Catherine was conscious of a vague sense of annoyance. Samara had not been near her all the morning. Once or twice, as she passed along the deck, she had seen him sitting in a corner of the smoking room — smoking a pipe and reading. It was not until after the bugle had sounded for luncheon that she met him in the companionway.

"I thought," she said, a little coldly, "that I was supposed to be here as your secretary."

He nodded.

"No work this morning," he declared.

"I had no intention of coming," she continued, "sim-

ply for a sea voyage. May I ask whether there will be work to do this afternoon? "

The gruffness passed from his manner. He looked at her abstractedly. She was wearing a long jumper of a distinctive shade of green, a cap of the same colour, and the wind had brought a wholesome touch of pink to her cheeks. Her tone was almost severe but her lips were already framing for a smile.

" There is a despatch," he announced, " which I wish to prepare for forwarding to London. We will begin it at three o'clock, if that suits you."

" It suits me very well indeed," she assured him.

They separated without further speech. A few minutes later, as he sat at his corner table from which the other chair had already been removed, he saw her coming towards him. This time there was a distinct frown upon her face.

" I understand," she said, " that you have told the second steward to give me a place somewhere else."

" I thought it would be more agreeable to you," he replied.

" You were entirely wrong," she confided. " I shall sit with you or take my meals on deck."

He rose at once to his feet and summoned a steward.

" Kindly relay this table," he directed. " Mademoiselle will share it with me."

She seated herself and looked at him severely.

" Why do you desire to dispense with my society after having made use of so much eloquence to obtain it? " she enquired. " I can assure you that I am a very desirable companion. I can be silent. I can be an eager listener — especially if you talk of Russia — or I can talk nonsense. You have only to name your humour, and I can respond to it. But I will not sit

with that noisy crowd of fat, curious women and their male belongings."

"You are very welcome here," he conceded, trying to conceal his own satisfaction. "The arrangement I proposed was largely for your sake. I thought that you would like to make acquaintances on board."

She drew herself up and looked at him with a smile, half amused, half haughty.

"Why? Acquaintances?"

His retort was prompt.

"As a young lady typist from the Bureau of the Weltmore Hotel, taking her first ocean trip," he began ——

"The trick is to you," she interrupted. "I don't like the sarcasm, though. Are you sure that you still believe in me, Mr. Samara?"

"Ought I to?" he retorted unexpectedly.

"We will waive the question," she decided, after a moment's deliberation.

The second steward came up to pay his respects and to suggest special dishes for dinner that night or luncheon on the morrow. The wine steward followed with news of some old brandy for which Samara had enquired, and his place in turn was taken by the First Officer, who paused for a moment or two on his way out.

"I trust, Mr. Samara," he said, "that you are keeping the matter in mind about which I spoke to you this morning."

"It is scarcely a matter which slips easily from one's memory," was the somewhat grim reply.

"What was he talking about?" Catherine asked, glancing curiously after the retreating figure.

"A gang of Bolshevists on board, being returned to their native country with thanks. They hate me like poison, of course, every one of them."

She looked troubled.

"I am sure I saw some of them," she confided, "when I was looking over into the steerage this morning. Even though they are my own country people, I thought they were horrible."

"There's nothing to fear from such cattle," he said shortly. "You'll have to get used to believing that I am immune from that sort of thing, if you work for me. You have had one dose of it already. As for these fellows, they are no good without organization. They may hate me like poison, but there isn't one of them would have the courage to risk his own life by trying to get rid of me for the sake of his fellows. The Bolshevist hasn't altruism enough for that."

After luncheon they parted for a time, and at three o'clock, preceded by a steward carrying her typewriter, Catherine presented herself in the little sitting room attached to Samara's suite. He was already there, talking to Ivan, or rather the latter was talking and Samara listening. Ivan had apparently worked himself into a state almost of passion. The words came from his lips in a little stream; his fists were clenched. His master pushed him out of the room with a few soothing words.

"Ivan's been down in the steerage," he explained, turning to Catherine with a smile. "Been running amuck with some of the scum there, I expect. He thinks that they'd do me a mischief if they could. So would a hundred thousand more of them, but they don't get the chance."

"I have not quite made up my mind about you yet," she said, as she seated herself at the table. "One thing I am quite sure about, though; I do not wish you to be assassinated whilst I am around, or indeed until I am convinced that your work for Russia is over. So

far as you have gone, I look upon you as the greatest Russian benefactor we have ever had. If only you would complete the work!"

"Restore the monarchy?"

"Yes."

"Some day we will argue the matter," he promised. "Now take down the text of my communication to the English Cabinet."

They worked for several hours, Catherine fascinated by the substance of what she wrote, the directness and lucidity with which Samara expressed himself. Sometimes he was at a loss for a word and at her suggestion he supplied her with a Russian one. They drifted now and then into the habit of exchanging remarks in that tongue.

"It seems odd to think that you have never actually been in your own country since you were old enough to remember!" he said abruptly.

"I spent three very strenuous years there, according to my mother," she confided. "My impressions are naturally a little mixed."

He returned to work and dismissed her only when the bugle sounded an hour before dinner. Afterwards he walked outside for a few minutes alone. It was already dusk, quieter than on the previous night but still with a long swell and half a gale blowing on the windward side of the ship. He paced the almost deserted deck once or twice thoughtfully. A whistle sounded from the bridge. Presently the boatswain came up to him and saluted.

"The Captain's compliments, sir, and would you speak to him for a moment in his room?"

Samara followed the man on to the covered deck and into the Captain's quarters. The latter, who had been changing for dinner, came out of his room.

"You will take a cocktail with me, Mr. Samara?" he invited.

"With pleasure."

In a moment there was the sound of the ice clinking in the shaker and the Captain's steward appeared with two frosted glasses full of amber liquid.

"You mustn't think us a lot of old women, Mr. Samara," the Captain begged, as he pushed the cigarettes across, "but I tell you frankly that we're rather nervous about you. We've got a rotten steerage on board, and I'm going to ask you not to walk these decks after dusk. If you care to come up on the bridge while the weather is in any way decent and clear, I shall be delighted. Plenty of exercise there, and all the wind you could want in the world."

Samara smiled faintly.

"I have to stick it out in Moscow, you know, and a good many other places which I visit in my own country," he reminded his companion.

"Precisely," the Captain agreed, "but permit me to point out a very vital difference. In your own country, for one man who would raise his hand against you there are a million to whom you are something like a god, and any would-be assassin would have to face the fact that he would probably be torn to pieces in a matter of seconds. On board this ship it is a very different matter. My First Officer tells me that we've got a score or more of the worst of your country people on board, who honestly believe in an ignorant way that they've got a grudge against you. It excites them to think that you are so near. They feel that they have a chance of getting at you they wouldn't have on land. I'm one of your great admirers, Mr. Samara, but there's a selfish side to this, too. I should hate anything to happen on my ship."

"I'll take every care," Samara promised. "Give me a cocktail like that now and then, and I'd almost promise to hide in my stateroom!"

The Captain smiled as he divided the remainder.

"It will take a load off our minds if you'll promise to be careful," he said. "We watch those fellows day and night, but they're as slippery as eels. Even now my boatswain tells me there's one of them he can't account for."

"Have they any firearms?"

"Not now. We've taken seven revolvers away from them — not a bad haul for less than a score. In one respect they are not as bad as the Dagos — they haven't all a knife up their sleeves."

Samara was escorted back to his quarters by the boatswain. Ivan, who was busy brushing his clothes, was still disturbed and anxious.

"I do not like this ship," he declared, as he shook out his master's coat. "There are evil men upon it."

"Turn on my bath, Ivan. Even evil men without arms in their hands can do no more than think evil thoughts," his master reminded him. "What in hell's name is that?"

There was a strange fugitive glimpse of a white face, pressed against the large, square window which took the place of a porthole; a face which slowly appeared from underneath the frosted lower part and came into sight gradually — a mass of black matted hair, sunken eyes, sunken cheeks, an expression scarcely human. Samara sprang forward, but Ivan held him back with all his giant strength. He pushed his master on one side and hastened to the door.

"It is for me, this, Master," he cried.

He was out on the deck in an instant. Samara snatched up a pistol from the drawer of his writing desk

and followed him. There was not a creature in sight. He looked up and down. Ivan crept underneath the boats. The place appeared to be deserted. Samara, with a shrug of his shoulders, returned to his stateroom. Ivan stood still on the deck; a giant figure, his long hair blowing about in the wind, the muscles of his arm taut, rage in his heart.

CHAPTER XI

Catherine had just finished a morning's work, which even she found severe. She leaned back in her chair with a little sigh of exhaustion. Her fingers were stiff, her arms numb, there was a slight dizziness at the back of her head. Outside, too, as though to tantalize her the more, the wind had gone down and the great liner was ploughing its level way through a blue sea as smooth as a carpet and bespangled with sunlight. Samara, with the inspiration of his last few sentences still in his brain, was like a man removed altogether from the world. He, too, was looking through that wide-flung porthole but with the air of one who seeks something beyond the swelling sea and the narrow boundaries of the blue horizon. Catherine, watching him with curious eyes, forgot for a moment her fatigue. He had indeed the air of a prophet. There was no follower of the cause which lay next to her own heart like this, she reflected sorrowfully. With a momentary pang she thought of Nicholas and that little circle back in New York, even now making their plans. The recollection failed altogether to exhilarate her.

The sound of the luncheon bugle brought their feet back to the ground. Samara turned swiftly around. For the first time that morning, as it seemed to Catherine, he looked at her as though she were a human being.

"You are tired," he exclaimed, — "of course you are tired! I have worked you for three hours without a pause. Ivan!"

The man appeared, silently for all his bulk, and with-

out a moment's delay. His master gave him a rapid order in Russian.

"If I am tired, it is a pleasure to feel so," she assured him. "I feel mentally as you men feel physically when you return from a long day's hunting. Only, if you will give me an hour's rest after luncheon, I shall sleep in the sunshine."

"I shall not work again to-day," he declared. "I've got rid of much that was in my mind. These thoughts collect in their little cells. One must bring them into shape or sometimes they slip away."

Ivan returned with two glasses full of frosted liquid on a tray. Catherine took one gratefully. Samara tossed his off at a draught.

"Come out into the sunshine for ten minutes before lunch," he invited.

She finished her *apéritif* and followed him gratefully enough on to the deck. They walked up and down once or twice. Then Catherine sank into her steamer chair and, after a moment's hesitation, he seated himself by her side.

"One scarcely needs exercise," she murmured. "The sun and this air are so wonderful and the decks are crowded. Besides, I hate walking. Tell me, Mr. Samara, if you will, — you write openly enough of the second stage in your great struggle for the regeneration of Russia. What is it?"

"Can't you imagine?" he answered, a little gloomily. "The escape from our obligations, written and unwritten, to Germany."

"Germany!"

She repeated the word. The full understanding of his announcement evaded her.

"Don't you see," he pointed out, "in the early days of Bolshevist Government, Germany obtained almost a

strangle hold upon Russia. The best of her industries were seized upon and worked by Germans. These profiteers made piles of money, but instead of investing it to develop Russia's resources, they kept it for themselves, to spend in their own country when they had sucked the thing dry. German capital was used freely enough but not for Russia's ultimate good. The fortunes made went abroad. Russian resources, Russian cheap labour, were merely the cat's-paw of German capitalists. The same thing in a different manner applied to our armies. It is quite true that German officers and German efficiency have made us a military power far in advance of our requirements, but for what purpose were those armies to be used, do you suppose? Not for Russia's benefit. That is why ——"

It was precisely at that moment that an incredible and amazing thing happened — seen first, to Samara's preservation, by Catherine. Scarcely fifteen feet from them was hung a boat, covered by a tight canvas covering. There was hardly a breath of wind and yet Catherine's attention had been attracted by the inexplicable movement of one of the knotted ends of rope which tied it down; an end which disappeared underneath the canvas as though drawn there by invisible fingers. There was a sudden gap in the folds of the canvas itself, and swiftly following, black tragedy, pregnant with fate; the instantaneous reappearance of that horrible face first seen by Samara through the window of his cabin and now more than ever like some diabolical jack-in-the-box, the top part of a body, collarless, clad in a grey flannel shirt only, a long skinny arm, gripping in its yellow fingers something that gleamed like silver in the sunlight.

It was an affair of seconds. Catherine never knew the instinct which prompted her. She caught hold of

Samara by the neck and dragged his face against hers. Even as she did so something flashed across those fifteen feet of space like a silver thunderbolt; something that hissed in the air and buried itself in the woodwork where Samara's head had been — buried itself almost to the hilt, and stayed there quivering. There were people walking both ways. They paused in amazement. Samara felt the fiery grip of Catherine's fingers released. He sprang to his feet, just as the misshapen little figure leaped out from the gap in the boat, jumped on to the deck and turned towards the steerage. Samara, large and loose-limbed though he was, was no less nimble. One long leap — and the man was in his grasp. It was like a rat in the grip of a well-conditioned sporting dog. Afterwards, it seemed to Catherine, sitting there numbed and motionless, that these things could scarcely have happened. A matter of seconds saw the beginning and end of an episode which might have changed the world's history. Samara, shaking with a great anger, held his miserable captive high over his head, shouted one word to him — a Russian word, harsh and uncouth it sounded — strode to the rail, held him for a moment poised, in full sight of half a hundred shivering and paralysed passengers, and flung him out into the sunlight, far away from the ship's side, into the soft blue bosom of the sea. Even people who had not seen, heard the splash and ran to the side of the boat. Samara leaned with the others over the rails. He became suddenly a spectator. Behind him, embedded three inches deep in the woodwork, the knife was still quivering, the sunshine reflected from it like gleams of lightning.

Pandemonium followed, but pandemonium through which ran a thread of order. There was the clanging of the gong from the Captain's bridge, the sudden shock of reversed engines, a boat in the sea almost before

people realised its lowering — a boat which seemed to be left far behind as the liner drifted on with her own momentum. A hundred glasses watched it. A hoarse murmur ran all down the line of anxious passengers. Samara felt a hand, as cold as ice, clutch his. Catherine was standing by his side.

"Have they picked him up?" she asked.

He nodded.

"These fellows have the lives of cats," he observed resignedly. "I quite thought that I had broken his neck when I threw him over."

A little crowd had gathered round the sinister-looking knife; others watched the return of the boat with the half-drowned man. In the background people gazed with awe and wonder at Samara — a man who had escaped death by a miracle, and the taking of life by a second one. He was momentarily engaged in tying a handkerchief round his right hand from which a few drops of blood were falling.

"The fellow tried to bite me when I got hold of his neck," he explained. "I shall go and see the doctor. Any one who touches this carrion needs disinfectants."

People made way for him right and left. The sight of that amazing retaliation of his had imbued him with a grotesque, yet heroic air. It was like a deed from a book of the Sagas. Then into that blazing atmosphere of tragedy there intervened a readjusting note. With puffed-out cheeks and earnest manner a pallid young man produced from a shining bugle the call for luncheon. Untoward and unexpected events are coldly looked upon on board ship. Routine and discipline are paramount. When Samara returned from the doctor's room with his hand neatly bandaged, he found most of the passengers, including Catherine, already seated at luncheon.

CHAPTER XII

The knife thrower brooded, so far as his narrow mind allowed him, in irons, for the remainder of the voyage, without even the solace of a word from his cowed companions. Samara, with Catherine always at hand to help, worked for several hours each morning, preparing a detailed report of his proceedings in New York. The other passengers loafed and idled and flirted their time away, very much in the usual fashion. Three uneventful days brought peace of mind to the Captain and to the First Officer.

"Am I a good secretary?" Catherine asked one evening at the completion of a long day's work.

"The best I ever had," he admitted promptly. "All the same, I am not so sure after all that we shall be able to work together for very long."

Her eyebrows were slightly raised.

"It should not be for you to say that," she protested. "If I am useful here, why should not I be equally so in Moscow? Andrew Kroupki, you tell me, will not be able to leave New York for more than a month."

"That is true."

"There is some one else in Moscow, perhaps?" she persisted.

"There is no one else," he assured her. "I have never had a woman secretary."

"Some one in your household would object to my presence?"

He frowned irritably.

"There is no woman whatever in my household," he said, "except an old housekeeper who was my nurse when I was a boy. It is not that. The bald truth is

that you are not the sort of secretary for a man like myself."

"Because of our political lack of sympathy?" she asked. "I can't help being a Monarchist, but as against that you have done Russia a magnificent service by freeing her from Bolshevism. I could never forget that."

"It is not a matter of politics at all," he confessed. "Can't you realise that I dislike having women around me as women? I prefer to keep an unbiassed mind. Women belong to the arts and graces of life. They have no place in our serious moments and enterprises."

She looked at him with gentle pity.

"Dear Mr. Samara," she said, "it is terrible to hear a man of intelligence like yourself talk such absolute nonsense. You are looking out on life with one eye shut."

"No great man was ever cumbered with womenkind," he declared. "Those who were, fell."

"If you quote Mark Antony and Napoleon to me I shall shriek," she threatened. "I wish we were entirely of the same way of thinking in other matters. I would soon convert you as to this."

"You should accept my obduracy as a compliment," he said. "If association with you had not its effect upon me I should automatically forget your sex."

"I should never let you," she assured him.

They were promenading the deck together. It was during the hour before dinner and they climbed to the boat deck and walked on the windward side to avoid the crowd. Here they were almost alone.

"My mind this afternoon," Catherine confided, "has, in intervals of work, been engrossed by thoughts of my own future. When do we reach Monte Carlo?"

"Next Thursday," he replied.

"How long do we stay there?" she enquired.

"At least a week," he answered. "One of my ministers is coming from Moscow to meet me, and there will be an emissary from a foreign country waiting for me."

"And after that?"

"We shall go to Moscow via Naples and Budapest. So far as you are concerned, when we arrive there, you will naturally be your own mistress. I hope, however, that you will continue to help me, at any rate until Andrew returns. I do not like to speak of money in connection with such services as you have rendered me, but I shall of course see that financially you are unembarrassed."

"Thank you," she said. "In any case I quite intend to come to Moscow with you."

He was silent, for a cause which, had she known it, would have flattered her.

"When you asked me to come with you and I, by the way, refused," she continued, "I knew nothing about Monte Carlo. I took it for granted that I should be taken direct to Moscow."

"You are disappointed?"

"Not I," she laughed. "What girl in the world would be disappointed at the chance of seeing Monte Carlo for the first time in her life! All the same, I am looking forward very much indeed to returning to my own country. Thanks to you, my friends are coming. The Grand Duchess has offered me a home, and I have no doubt that Nicholas would give me a post as his secretary if I asked him. Tzars have to have secretaries, I suppose."

"Nicholas Imanoff will never be Tzar," he told her grimly. "I haven't saved Russia from the Bolshevists to hand it back to one of his breed."

"Really," she murmured. "Well, Nicholas quite

thinks he is going to be. He'd look rather wonderful, wouldn't he, in white uniform and a crown?"

"For an exceedingly sensible young woman you talk a lot of nonsense," he said.

"When I'm in the mood," she confided, "no one can stop me. Still, if you don't press me to remain with you after we get to Moscow, I shall always believe that it is because you are afraid of me."

"You will be quite right," he confessed. "I am already."

She laughed softly and turned to the Captain whom they had just encountered.

"Such a confession, Captain!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Samara here, who fears no cutthroat, laughs at bullets, and despises bombs, is afraid of poor me."

"I do not wonder," was the prompt reply. "It is his peace of mind which is in danger."

"It may be that," she reflected. "It is at any rate a flattering thought."

"What are we to do with your Russian lunatic?" the Captain enquired, turning to Samara.

The latter shrugged his shoulders.

"What do I care? Keep him in irons until I have left the ship, and then, whatever you will. You'd much better have left him where I sent him."

The Captain smiled.

"Sometimes," he admitted, "I think that the ways of a few hundred years ago were the better."

He passed on and Samara and his companion continued their walk.

"I have quite made up my mind as to my future," Catherine declared. "I wish to come to Moscow with you, to find apartments in the city pending the arrival of my friends, and to continue my work as your secretary — your junior secretary, of course — until that

unfortunate young man in New York recovers. I am deeply interested in your outlook. I think there are certain aspects of the life and evolution of my country which you understand better than any living person. Don't send me away from you, please, Mr. Samara. Remember that you are entirely responsible for my coming."

"Why the devil shouldn't I?" he demanded with sudden harshness. "You'll leave me as soon as you've learnt all you want to learn. You haven't come at all in the spirit in which I appealed to you to come. You patronise my outlook. In your heart you despise it."

She contrived to keep by his side without loss of dignity, although he had turned abruptly around and was making for the steps.

"You are very severe all of a sudden," she complained. "Where are you off to in this tremendous haste?"

"To the smoking room to drink cocktails," he growled. "Beware of me at dinner time. I may have a few home truths to tell you."

"I shall come with you," she declared. "I need sustenance myself. I wish I did not look so strong. Then you would perhaps be more sympathetic. And as regards those cocktails you are a very fraudulent person. Nothing that you ever drink makes the slightest difference to you."

He laughed hardly.

"You are quite right," he admitted. "It doesn't. Still there are times when I like the fire in my veins, even when it leads nowhere. Come if you wish to, by all means."

They sat at a corner table in the smoking room, the object, as usual, of a great deal of attention, although few people at any time ventured upon more than a

respectful salute. When she had finished her *apéritif*, Catherine rose.

"Go and change now, please," she begged. "I feel that our conversation at dinner time may be interesting, and I don't want you to sit here and drink more cocktails and be half an hour late."

He rose to his feet but only to let her pass. For a few minutes after she had gone, he remained silent. To the bartender, who paused before him in expectation of a further order, he only shook his head. He told himself that a certain minor crisis in his life was arising, and that he must meet it with a cool brain. He had been conscious of its near approach ever since he had found it more easy to remember the cling of Catherine's arm around his neck than the hiss of the knife with its sickening little stab, from which she had saved him. Even now there was a strange and unfamiliar sensation of pleasure as he recalled the clasp of her fingers, the touch of her cheek against his. Folly for any man. Lunacy for him!

Yet, at its very outset the spontaneity of their dinner conversation was ruined by an untoward and ugly episode. The second steward bore down upon them almost as soon as they had taken their places, whilst Samara was still stroking the green-eyed black cat who came to his chair every evening. He was carrying a silver tureen which he set down upon the table.

"Our under-chef," he confided, "has sent you some Russian Bortsch soup, with some cream sauce. He was in service once with a Russian family at Nice and learnt something of their cooking."

"Very good, if it is really Bortsch," Catherine remarked. "Am I to have a little?"

The steward smiled reassuringly.

"The chef has prepared plenty, madam," he said, as he served it. "I was specially to recommend the sauce."

Samara poured some of the latter a little absently into his plate and held it towards the cat.

"You'll never get rid of him if you give him cream, sir," the man observed, as he turned away.

Samara held out his hand towards Catherine, who was about to commence her dinner.

"Wait," he insisted, "just one moment."

She saw the horror creep into his face and leaned over. The cat lay on its side. Already its eyes were half closed and its limbs were stiffening. The second steward, who had been talking at a table close at hand, came hurrying back.

"Why, what's wrong with the cat, sir?" he exclaimed. "Seems as though he was going to have a fit."

"It is your chef's specially prepared dish that is the matter with the cat," Samara said drily. "You had better take the rest of it to the doctor."

The man's face was white with horror.

"Just a moment, sir," he begged. "I've got to get down to the kitchens first. I wonder whether you'd mind coming with me?"

Samara rose and followed him. Two of the stewards carried out the cat. The chief steward himself came and removed the dishes from the table. There was a babel of conversation. No one knew exactly what had happened.

There was a certain drama in the little scene below, although Samara himself was chiefly conscious of a sense of bitter anger. The under-chef, in his soiled white clothes and white cap, stood with folded arms, leaning against the wall in the doctor's little consulting room.

The doctor was present, also the chief steward and the Captain. The latter wasted little time upon the matter.

"Look here," he said to the young man, "you declare that there was nothing harmful in the soup or the sauce you sent up for Mr. Samara."

"It was made as I have always made it," was the sullen reply. "As for the cat, he has fits. It was that and nothing else."

"Very well," the Captain continued. "There is the sauce upon the table. Doctor, I dare say you can find a wineglass. You shall drink a wineglassful and we will believe you."

Something of the chef's bravado left him. He watched the sauce poured into a medicine glass which the doctor held out towards him. He took it into his hands and hesitated for a moment. Then he dashed it on to the floor.

"I will not drink it," he declared. "You cannot force me to."

The Captain nodded to a sailor who had been waiting outside.

"Put him in irons at once," he ordered.

The man made a sudden spring for the door, but the chief steward caught him by the collar and swung him round. He stood shivering, helpless, but with a look of hate in his eyes. He glared at Samara and the desire to kill was mingled with the hate.

"I may fail and others may fail," he cried, "but some day, some one will succeed!"

Samara's anger seemed to have passed. He looked at his would-be assassin curiously.

"You are a Russian?" he asked.

"Yes," was the sullen reply.

"Why should you try to kill me — you and these others you speak of? I have worked hard for Russia."

The man spat upon the floor.

"You have worked hard for yourself," he snarled. "You are an autocrat, worse than any Tzar who ever ruled at Peterhof. You're a tyrant, an enemy of Soviet Government. That is why we hate you. You stand for the personal; I, and all real Russian patriots, for the Republic!"

They led him away. There was a look almost of sadness in Samara's eyes as he turned to leave the cabin. The man was obviously one of an ignorant band of anarchists, ill-educated, filled with poisonous doctrines. Yet a gleam of truth sometimes flashed out from unexpected places.

CHAPTER XIII

Catherine, a morning or so later, leaned over the white rail of the boat deck and watched the blue fires playing about the wires overhead.

"These Marconi people must bless you, Mr. Samara," she observed.

"I think they are more disposed to curse me," he answered. "They've had very little rest for the last twenty-four hours."

She looked at him meditatively. He was, without a doubt, notwithstanding a certain uncouthness and an ungraceful stoop of his broad shoulders, a fine figure of a man. The touch of sunburn acquired during the last few days became him. She approved of the few grey hairs by his ears, the inflexible mouth, his eyes so full of colour.

"I never thought I should like a man with blue eyes," she said irrelevantly.

"Do you like me?" he asked.

She laughed ironically.

"What a question! Why else should I be here, putting myself, as one of these dear old ladies said the other morning, 'in a most difficult position — private secretary to, and travelling alone with, an unmarried man'? They don't know what a tower of strength you are, do they?"

"I hope," he answered gruffly, "that they have sense enough to realise that I have something else to think about these days besides playing the gallant."

She glanced upwards again at those blue fires which seemed ceaseless.

"One loses one's sense of proportion out here at

sea," she ruminated. "I am inclined sometimes to forget that you are a very important person. This sort of thing reminds me," she added, pointing to the wires overhead. "How many messages have you received today?"

"I have not counted," he answered. "The last one from England is the most important. For the first time I am inclined to regret that this is not a Southampton boat. I think that I must go to London."

"Delightful!" she murmured. "I can't believe that it compares with New York, but I should like to see it."

"You probably will, then," he assured her. "The Prime Minister has invited me to visit him before I return to Moscow."

"If I were Andrew Kroupki," she remarked suggestively, "you would perhaps go a little further and tell me just what he wants to discuss with you."

"There is no reason why you should not know," he observed, after a moment's hesitation. "Your own common sense can very likely visualise the situation. Naturally what I am doing is of immense interest to England. For the last fifteen years the Russian armies have been the greatest menace to peace in Europe. I have realised that myself, although I have been powerless to act. The rumoured demobilisation of even a portion of them is an event of the utmost importance to England and France."

"I quite understand that," Catherine declared, "but tell me, are any of those messages from Berlin?"

A smile parted his lips, a smile which she was beginning to look for and appreciate. It was like the grin of a boy who sees mischief ahead. He pointed to the blue fires which were still snapping away above them.

"Hell!" he confided. "Hell and every kind of fury!"

"What fun!" she murmured. "When do we face the storm?"

"The first breath of it in Monte Carlo," he replied. "Von Hartsen is meeting me there, and I don't think he's exactly carrying the olive branch."

A messenger from the Marconi office brought Samara still another despatch. He tore open the envelope and read it carefully.

"From the War Office at Moscow," he remarked. "They're deluged with enquiries from Berlin. I must send them a short reply."

He strolled away and climbed the steps into the Marconi room. Catherine descended to the lower deck and made her way to her chair. She had scarcely seated herself before she became aware of a new neighbour on her left-hand side — a middle-aged man with dark beard and moustaches, wearing tortoise-shell rimmed spectacles and a travelling cap with long flaps. At her approach, he laid down the book he had been reading and glanced cautiously around.

"I have been looking for an opportunity of a word with you, Miss Borans," he said, speaking with a thick guttural accent. "It is very difficult to find you alone."

"Who are you and what do you want?" she asked coldly.

"My name is Lorenzheim," he told her. "Karl Lorenzheim. I am a friend. Look at this, please."

He handed her a crumpled-up visiting card of Kirdorff's. On the back was a line scrawled in pencil:

"Lorenzheim is a friend. You can treat him with confidence."

"So you know Colonel Kirdorff," she remarked.

"I am a member of the Club of which he is secretary," her new acquaintance confided. "He is a Russian and I am a German, but we are friends. We see

things the same way. We are all friends. He desired me to make myself known to you when a safe opportunity occurred."

"You are very mysterious," she observed. "What do you mean by a 'safe opportunity'?"

"When Mr. Samara is not around," was the significant reply.

She twisted the card which he had given her in her fingers and returned it to him.

"Mr. Samara is on the upper deck attending to some Marconigrams," she said. "He will be back directly."

"Marconigrams, eh!" Mr. Lorenzheim repeated. "You see them — what?"

"I know what some of them are about," she assented.

He smiled.

"You are very cautious," he declared. "I do not blame you but you can trust me. Mr. Samara," he went on, "is a very great man, but he is a great man for his own people — not for yours or mine."

"I know nothing about his relations with your country," she said. "So far as regards my own friends he has treated them with great generosity."

"Generosity!" Mr. Lorenzheim scoffed. "What is this you say? Generosity, indeed! There is Nicholas Imanoff, who should to-day be ruler of Russia, selling bonds in New York. Who rules the country in his stead? Samara! Oh, you all say he's a great man because he drove out the Bolshevists. I tell you that the Bolshevists committed suicide with their follies and excesses. If Samara had not dealt them their death blow, Russia would have reverted to a monarchy fifteen years ago."

"That may be," she replied. "I still say that Sa-

mara has acted generously in summoning my friends back to Russia."

Mr. Lorenzheim took off his spectacles and polished them.

"We must not quarrel, you and I," he said tolerantly. "You call it 'generosity.' I call it 'folly.' Never mind! I have been looking for you to ask you a question. What you tell me is as though you told it to Kirdorff himself. We want to know whether Samara has any idea of tampering with the Second Army, and whether his messages from Moscow have spoken of any disaffection amongst the soldiers themselves."

Catherine moved a little uneasily in her chair. She was suddenly conscious of a sense of immense repugnance to this intruder, to his message and all its suggestions. It was with almost a feeling of horror that she realised how entirely it was taken for granted that she was occupying her present position under false pretences, that she was in reality a spy upon the man for whom she was supposed to be working. Her tone when she spoke lacked all enthusiasm.

"There is nothing definite at present which I can impart to you," she declared.

He turned and looked at her through his bespectacled eyes.

"You do not doubt my credentials?" he asked. "Kirdorff has known me for many years."

"It has not occurred to me to doubt anything that you have said," she replied. "I am not used, however, to have my new occupation taken so much for granted."

"Occupation?" he repeated mystified.

"As a spy."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Those who toil for great causes," he said, "must stoop sometimes to displeasing methods. Pardon if I

return to my book. We speak again together. Mr. Samara approaches."

Samara carried more despatches in his hand. He paused in front of Catherine's chair.

"Come and walk with me," he invited a little abruptly. "I have something to say to you."

She rose at once and he led the way to a sheltered corner aft where there were usually some empty chairs. He ensconced her in one and remained himself standing beside her.

"We shall land in three days," he announced. "It is essential that after my meeting with Von Hartsen I should go at once to Moscow, or remain in Monte Carlo for a few days. There is, however, this invitation from the Prime Minister of England to be dealt with. Will you undertake a commission there for me?"

They were nearing the Straits and she looked thoughtfully out across the sea to the bare rocky coast of North Africa. Samara watched her with impatience.

"I wonder whether you realise," she said at last, "that it is less than a fortnight since I came to your rooms from the Hotel Weltmore Typewriting Bureau to work for you?"

"Twenty-seven hours less than a fortnight," he assented. "What of it?"

"You have already entrusted me with a great many of your secrets," she reminded him, "and the little you know of me is not altogether, from your point of view, a recommendation. I belong, in fact, to a political party opposed to your views and your system of Government. Don't you think that you are placing a little too much trust in me?"

"I do not," he answered, "or I should not ask you to undertake this mission to London. You are a patriot

and even though your sympathies are still engrossed in a romantic but hopelessly out-of-date cause, you admit that I have done a great work for Russia. Why should I not trust you? When I find you embroiled in a monarchist plot it will be time enough for me to send you to a fortress."

"Will you ever have the heart to do that?" she whispered, looking at him with a provocative gleam in her eyes.

"Heart!" he repeated gruffly. "I have no heart. If you betrayed my confidence, I should see that you had what you deserved."

"Nevertheless," she persisted, with a return to her more serious manner, "I think you are disposed to put too much trust in me."

He looked down at her with the momentary irritation of an elder towards a child.

"Neither a guarantee of secrecy," he declared, "nor absolute immunity from theft can ever be purchased or built up with bolts and bars. Trust, considered and calculated trust, is safety. To know where to bestow it is, I admit, a form of genius. If I seem to you flamboyantly trustful, it is your judgment that is wrong. I believe in your sense of honour and my own instinct. Kindly let that end the discussion."

That night they were anchored in the Bay of Gibraltar, in the shadow of the great Rock ablaze with its thousand pin-pricks of fire. Samara was summoned from the dinner table to receive a call from the Governor who had come aboard in his launch, and Catherine leaned for some time over the side of the ship, watching the little boats below with their wares of fruit and flowers and tinselly merchandise. Presently room was made at the foot of the gangway for the Governor's launch, and he and Samara stood for a moment or two

at the top of the steps talking. Then the former took his leave and soon after Samara found his way to her side.

"Come on the upper deck," he invited. "These people below are so noisy."

She obeyed at once. They sat on one of the fixed seats with their back to the Fortress and as far removed as possible from the hubbub of the extemporised market. She asked him a question about the Governor.

"A pleasant man and very friendly," he told her. "Naturally, as an old soldier, he was interested in the demobilisation of our armies. He was very anxious for me to go and spend the night at Government House."

"Why didn't you?" she asked idly.

He made some casual answer, but his sudden realisation of the truth was a shock to him. A celebrated French traveller was staying there whom he was anxious to meet, and an English writer whose works had interested him, yet the desire not to leave the ship was paramount. He frowned as he looked meditatively across the Bay to the lights of Algeciras.

"I shall go to London if you wish me to," she announced abruptly.

"I imagined you would," he replied. "Your mission, of course, will be more personal than official, but at the same time I shall entrust you with a message to the Prime Minister which I do not care to send through our own representatives there. We have three days more to talk of that, though."

"I wish it were longer," she confessed.

"You do not regret having come, then?" he asked.

"I have never regretted it for an instant," she assured him. "All the same, to me this voyage seems to grow in unreality every day. I can't really believe that I have left New York behind, that we are here in

European waters and that I am working day by day with you. It doesn't seem part of my life — like something detached, something which might have happened but didn't."

She turned to catch a glimpse of an expression in his face which startled her. There had been moments lately when she had been almost terrified of him.

"It has been an unusual experience for me," he admitted. "I have never worked with a woman before."

She suddenly laughed. His way of alluding to their association appealed to her sense of humour as she thought of the long nights they had sat on deck, with the rushing of the wind around, the leaning stars and the long golden pathway to the moon; of their long talks and their long silences. More than once, tragedy, passing by, had lifted them out of the world of commonplace things and forced them into a position of more than ordinary intimacy. Was it his sense of honour, of guardianship, she wondered, which had kept him always so aloof, or was it that she herself made no appeal to him? She had remained all the time perfectly natural, had made no effort at any artificial reserve. Vaguely she found herself somewhat resenting his attitude. Many of the men on board had, in their own way, directly or indirectly, done their best to intimate the fact that they found her attractive. Samara had never once even looked at her as though he recognised the desirability which made other men hang round her chair and seek her company. An irresistible longing to evoke a more personal note in him assailed her.

"You find it as easy to work with me as with a man?" she asked.

"I have never noticed the difference," he answered calmly. "You are very efficient."

Her lips relaxed and she smiled at him.

"I am a great deal nicer to look at than your other secretary," she said reflectively. "I do you more credit, too."

"In what way?"

"Poor Andrew Kroupki," she murmured. "He looks half-starved and very miserable. I, on the other hand, look well fed and content. No one would suspect you of ill-treating me."

"One does not choose a secretary for her personal appearance," he remarked.

"Some men do, I am afraid," she replied.

He looked at her and she was not quite so sure of herself. In the darkness his face seemed more dominant than ever, his mouth almost cruel in its strength. Only his eyes were a little disturbing.

"You don't imagine that that sort of thing would appeal to me?" he asked scornfully.

"I wonder what does appeal to you," she sighed. "Evidently I don't."

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"How does a woman generally know?" she retorted.

She had an indefinable sense of disaster — or triumph. She suddenly felt the clasp of his arm around her waist, the touch of his fingers upon her hair and cheek. She had not before doubted her ability to meet any situation which might arise, but in this moment of trial she failed utterly and helplessly. She was suddenly weak in all her limbs. She made not the slightest resistance to a thing which had never yet happened to her, which she had never, for a moment, contemplated. His eyes seemed like fires, but softer — softer every moment. The cruel lines of his mouth, too, seemed to have relaxed. His lips touched hers firmly yet softly, lingered

there whilst passion grew. She was almost swooning in his arms.

He released her quite gently yet with a certain abruptness. He rose to his feet and stood looking down at her, massive, unemotional, yet with some subtle air of the conqueror. She returned his gaze, helpless, her hands gripping the back of the seat. A corner of the moon showing from behind a jagged mass of cloud faintly illuminated her face. Her lips were still quivering. It was not for her to know that a new light in her eyes had suddenly made her more beautiful than ever before.

"Mr. Samara!" she gasped.

"I am sorry," he answered, "but I am also glad!"

She heard his receding footsteps along the deck, saw him knock at the door of the Captain's quarters, enter and disappear. Below there was still the subdued hubbub of the hucksters. In a more distant boat a swarthy Spanish woman was singing a love song to the music of a guitar.

CHAPTER XIV

An Englishman seated upon a divan in one of the lofty rooms of the Salons Privés nudged on the arm his companion, newly arrived from England. He was by way of being showman and had been pointing out the notabilities of the place.

"Do you see the fair young man moving round the table on the left?" he asked.

"Good-looking fellow with a scar on his face? Yes. Who is he?"

"In his way a very interesting person," was the earnest reply. "That is Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern. They say that he is the most popular young man in Germany."

"I was reading about him only last week," the other observed. "One of the papers was saying that he had modelled himself entirely upon our present King when he was the same age — goes in for all sorts of sports and is always doing something thoroughly democratic."

"If Germany is ever foolish enough to discard her republic, there goes the future Kaiser," his companion announced.

The young man in question made a very slow progress through the rooms. He apparently met friends at every moment, with most of whom he stopped to talk, and although he seemed scarcely in the place for the purpose of gambling, he occasionally risked a twenty-franc piece at the tables. Presently he passed out of the ken of his two observers, and, having completed a tour of the rooms, as though in unsuccessful search of some one, collected his hat and cane in the cloakroom and strolled

out. He was greeted everywhere with a great deal of attention, and he was obviously exceedingly careful to return all salutations. As soon as he was alone, however, a somewhat supercilious smile took the place of his apparent bonhomie, and he yawned once or twice on his way to the Sporting Club. Here he was again received with great consideration, and made his way up the stairs into the smaller roulette rooms. An elderly man of exceedingly aristocratic appearance moved eagerly towards him from one of the little groups. Prince Frederick welcomed him with a sigh of relief.

"I have been looking everywhere for you, General," he declared. "Come and tell me the news."

They moved off towards the bar.

"There is no news," the older man replied. "He has not yet arrived."

Prince Frederick seemed disappointed.

"I thought the boat was due in yesterday," he observed.

"It was due," the General assented, "but it has been delayed by bad weather. I am expecting to hear at any moment that it is in the bay."

The two sat in a corner of the bar. In his own country the Prince always drank beer. Here, he called for a mixed vermouth. They spoke for a little time upon incidents connected with his journey. It seemed that he had only reached Monte Carlo that afternoon.

"It is a relief," the General declared with a little sigh, "to be in a place like this, my dear Frederick, where you and I can meet and talk openly. Even though I was your tutor, people whisper in Berlin if we are seen much together, especially since I became a member of the Government. You have been as busy as usual, I suppose?"

Prince Frederick yawned.

"Last week," he confided, "I opened two flower shows, unveiled a statue, opened a tennis tournament and played in it myself, took the chair at the Flying Club dinner, and joined in the parade, opened a new fencing academy and fenced the first bout and attended two commercial banquets. Not so bad, considering that I had to show up at the bank each day. Lucky no one knows how little work I really do there."

"It is not necessary for you to do any at all," the General reminded him. "The directors are all our friends and members of our party."

"All the same," the young man declared, sipping his vermouth, "it is a grind. That dear English relative of mine in whose footsteps I am supposed to be treading, only had to pose as a democrat in sentiment — not to transform himself into a bank clerk. I hate the atmosphere of these places. The camp and the barracks are my home."

His mentor smiled tolerantly.

"You must remember, my dear Frederick," he said, "that until our day comes it is as well for you to keep your military instincts as far as possible in the background. The *bourgeoisie* would be shaking their heads and likening you to your respected great-grandfather if you gave them the opportunity. That side of it will come later. All that I pray is that I may live to see it."

"All good Germans must pray for that," the Prince agreed, lighting a cigarette. "We have become giants of commerce during the last twenty years simply because we are a great people and bound to succeed in anything we undertake — but at heart we are a military nation."

The General looked at his pupil and smiled fondly.

"It is in the blood," he murmured.

"Tell me the latest news of this man Samara," the latter demanded a little abruptly.

The General frowned.

"It is very hard to speak of the matter coolly," he declared. "We Germans made Russia a military nation. We trained their men, we made their guns and flying machines, we taught and equipped them from conscript to general. We constructed a mighty engine of destruction ready for our use when the time came. It suited the old régime. The soldier was the only man who could be sure of regular food and comfortable living, and every one wanted to be in the army. Now, under the new order, everything is changed. Industrially and agriculturally Russia is forging ahead, and now, without warning to anybody, Samara calmly announces to the world that he desires to reduce his army to the proportions suggested by the League of Nations and insists that he needs the soldiers for industrial developments. His representative in Moscow told Baron Gusman plainly a few days ago that the Russian Government no longer recognised any military understanding with Germany."

"What about our own Cabinet?" the Prince asked eagerly. "How do they take the matter?"

"Their attitude," the General replied, "is, so far as it goes, satisfactory. I am here as a special envoy, instructed to formally protest against any further demobilisation of the Russian armies, to remind Samara of our previous agreements, and to demand an explanation of his present policy. Except for a handful of socialists, the motion in favour of my mission was carried unanimously."

"They say Samara is a great autocrat," Prince Frederick reflected. "Supposing he takes high ground?"

His companion was silent. He glanced around the room and, although they were in a retired spot, he dropped his voice.

"Then he may bring the day of fulfilment nearer," he said. "Samara's hold upon the people is as yet unproved and propaganda amongst the army has already begun."

A young man who had been standing upon the threshold, as though in search of some one, suddenly recognised the General and advanced. He bowed respectfully to Prince Frederick and handed a despatch to the former.

"A wireless from the American boat, sir," he announced. "She is in sight and expects to land her passengers within the hour."

The General tore open the envelope and read its contents.

"Samara will see me at six o'clock to-night at the Hôtel de Paris," he announced, with satisfaction. "Excellent!"

"Then, by dinner time to-night," the Prince began slowly ——

"By dinner time to-night," the General interrupted, "I shall know what is at the back of Samara's mind. If he means to play us false — well, it will mean a complete reversal of our present foreign policy. It may lead to even greater changes than that."

A very beautiful and world-famous young woman looked in at the door and, recognising Prince Frederick, smiled at him. He rose at once to his feet.

"I go to play baccarat with Mademoiselle," he announced. "We have an arrangement."

His mentor in chief laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Amuse yourself," he said tolerantly, "but remember — these little escapades are as well kept secret.

There are gossips amongst our newspaper men and the Princess Freda is exacting in some matters."

The young man smiled.

"Even my sainted prototype," he remarked, as he turned away, "had a weakness for beautiful ladies."

General von Hartsen played roulette for a time, took a stroll along the front, watching the great American steamer which had just arrived, and finally presented himself at the Hôtel de Paris at the appointed hour. Samara was engaged in the task of sorting his letters with Catherine's help. He received his visitor at once, however, shook hands with him and motioned him to a seat.

"Is this a visit of courtesy, General," he demanded, "or am I to consider it, in any sense of the word, official?"

"Friendly, if you please, sir," was the slightly formal reply, "but also official. I am the bearer of representations from the Government in whose labours I have the honour to share, to the Chairman of the Council of the Russian Republic."

Samara shrugged his shoulders and turned away from the letters. He had the air of one preparing to receive battle.

"In that case, General," he begged, "pray proceed. I am entirely at your service."

The latter glanced courteously but questioningly towards Catherine.

"The young lady," he began ——

"Let me present you," Samara interrupted. "General von Hartsen — Miss Borans, my secretary."

The General bowed low but his expression was still a puzzled one. His eyes remained fixed upon Catherine.

"Miss Borans," he repeated, "you will pardon me,

I am sure, but I am under the impression that we must have met before."

"I think not," Catherine replied, shaking her head slightly.

"Unless you have ever been a visitor to the United States, it is improbable," Samara intervened. "Miss Borans has lived there all her life."

"In that case I am doubtless deceived by a likeness," the General confessed. "You will forgive my adding, Mr. Samara, that our present conference must be a private one."

"I have no secrets from my secretary," Samara insisted. "Miss Borans is discretion itself. She would in any case handle any report of our interview which I might have to submit to my Council."

Von Hartsen bowed.

"Very well, sir," he said, "I will proceed. I am directed by the ministers of the German Republic to ask you for full particulars concerning this proposed demobilisation of a portion of your armies and further to enquire what change of policy such a step is meant to indicate. I think I need not be more explicit."

"Not the slightest need of it," Samara acquiesced. "Pray sit down. Smoke a cigar if you will, and I'll tell you all about it. I'll tell you just what my plans and hopes are for the future of Russia and incidentally, at the risk of shocking you, you shall learn my exact views as to the establishment of what I term mercenary armies."

The General's face grew a shade sterner. He put back the cigar which he had been in the act of clipping and folded his arms.

"I am at your service, sir," he announced.

CHAPTER XV

The General listened with more or less patience to all that was in Samara's mind, and found the situation a great deal worse than he had expected. Towards the conclusion of their interview he became very angry indeed.

"I consider that the course of action which you propose, Mr. Samara, is entirely at variance with your obligations towards my country," he announced.

"I recognise no obligations towards your country," was the brusque reply. "I have from the first warned you that it was my intention at the earliest opportunity to rid myself of the great armies which my misguided predecessors, aided by you, have brought into being. To have done so would have been my first action on coming into power if it had been possible to have found the men employment. I have now made arrangements which will enable me to put half a million men on the land and half a million into industrial pursuits. Demobilisation of the Third Army will commence the day I return to Moscow."

"And what about the First and Second?" the General demanded.

"I shall follow suit with the Second almost at once," Samara answered. "I look upon a trained army as an incentive to militarism, and I don't intend to maintain one. Since you are here I may as well inform you that my Government will issue a proclamation before the end of next month, requiring all officers of German nationality to resign their commissions and leave the country. A certain bonus will be allotted to them but that will be a matter of adjustment."

General von Hartsen found self-control an exceedingly difficult matter.

"You recognise, I trust, Mr. Samara," he said, "that such a proceeding will be considered by my Government as an unfriendly act?"

"I'm not afraid that you'll go to war about it, if that is what you mean," was the prompt retort. "You won't waste your resources on us whilst England and France are upon the face of the earth. And to be perfectly frank with you, General, if it was ever in your mind to use any part of the Russian army for any German military enterprise, I can assure you that the idea was hopeless from the first. I do not intend that during my tenure of office the blood of a single Russian peasant shall be shed upon the battle field. There was too much of that in nineteen-fifteen and sixteen."

"You're more of a pacifist than I ever believed possible for a man of vigorous action, Mr. Samara," the General sneered.

"That may easily be so," Samara assented. "I'm a pacifist at any rate so far as this, that I do not intend to support a standing army. Every Russian citizen, as he grows up, will be taught how to fight in his country's defence if ever it should become necessary. Beyond that — nothing."

Von Hartsen rose to his feet.

"You realise, Mr. Samara, I suppose," he said, "that even at home you will have to face something like a cataclysm. Your men do not wish for demobilisation."

"They will wish for it fast enough when they see what I can offer them," was the confident reply. "America has lent me enough money to provide for a million of them, and Great Britain has asked me to ex-

plain my needs so far as regards the others. I am sending an envoy there to-morrow."

The General bowed coldly to Catherine and to Samara without extending his hand.

"I shall report the issue of our conversation to my Government, Mr. Samara," he announced. "They will probably make further representations to you."

He took his leave. Samara, with his hands in his pockets, walked to the window and stood looking out at the great front of the Casino and at the gardens below, whistling softly to himself.

"Well," he remarked presently, "it's a stupid game. German diplomacy is always so obvious. As though any one couldn't see that our armies were meant to be the cat's-paw to snatch out of the fire the chestnuts of revenge. Russia will never fight in my day except in self-defence."

"You might have civil war," Catherine reminded him calmly.

Samara swung round on his heel.

"Civil war," he growled. "About as much chance of it as the end of the world. The whole fault of the Russian as a politician is that he's too indifferent. That's why the Bolshevists were able to keep going as long as they did. The Russian wants peace and to go on as he is going. It is the aim of my life to see that he gets his wish. Miss Borans, listen to me for a moment, please."

"I am listening," she assured him.

"I hear from the Chief of the Police that enquiries are being made in Moscow for suitable accommodation for pretty well the whole of your Royalist friends. Well, I told them that they should be welcome back to Russia and they are welcome, but I want it to be clearly understood that they must live and behave as

ordinary citizens. They must recognise and observe the law and the government of the country."

Catherine inclined her head.

"That seems reasonable," she admitted.

"I do not imagine for a moment that they are foolish enough to entertain the idea of anything in the nature of a definite conspiracy," Samara continued, "but if they did attempt anything of the sort, I should be quite powerless to help them. You will drop them a hint perhaps."

"I will certainly do so if I think it necessary," she promised.

They parted a little stiffly, Samara to interview an emissary from Moscow, Catherine to spend a delightful hour wandering about the gardens and Terrace of the little principality. She returned about eight o'clock, dined alone in the spacious salon attached to Samara's suite, and was standing at the window gazing rather longingly at the curving arc of lights along the Terrace when Samara himself suddenly entered the room.

"You?" she exclaimed. "I thought you were dining with your man from Moscow."

"I have dined with him," Samara answered. "I have sent him back home to-night. General von Hartsen's attitude does not disturb me in the least but it is necessary to prepare them at the War Office."

"And you?" she enquired.

"I have other affairs to attend to here and shall await your return from London. You will leave to-morrow morning, or rather midday."

"Do you wish to work now?" she asked.

"Don't be absurd," he scoffed. "Who ever works the first night in Monte Carlo? I wish to take you to the Casino and to the Club, but you must be differently dressed."

"Indeed," she murmured with a smile. "Well, you didn't give me much chance to bring clothes along, did you?"

"You must be able to do something," he insisted impatiently.

"As a matter of fact," she confided, "I have bought a little black frock this evening whilst I was wandering about. It is very simple and I don't know that it has come yet."

"Go and put it on," he directed, "and meet me here in half an hour's time."

She moved towards the door but on the threshold she looked back at him reflectively.

"I am not at all sure," she declared, "that I wish to go out with you."

He returned her gaze without moving a muscle.

"Because I kissed you and haven't apologised?" he asked.

She laughed softly.

"Not quite that," she admitted.

"What then?" he demanded.

Her eyes mocked him inscrutably.

"What an ingénu you are when you leave your own world for a minute," she said, disappearing through the door.

An hour later they were seated side by side on a divan in the Sporting Club. People were standing three and four deep around the tables and play was for the moment impossible. Catherine, serenely beautiful, and with her intense curiosity concealed by the force of habit, was entirely content. Samara was moodily interested.

"But who are these people?" she asked him. "I've never seen such jewels even at the opera at New York. And the men — here at last is a new type."

Her companion smiled.

"I am a poor showman," he admitted. "I have been here twice before in my life, but even I recognise some faces. There is Prince Artelberg, the Austrian Premier, the man who has very nearly made a country of Austria again."

"But the lady with him, in blue silk?"

"One seldom recognises the ladies," Samara answered drily. "The two men passing by are English. The nearer one is in the British Embassy at Moscow. The tall man with the grey beard and the small order is the King of Gothland. Alas, I am recognised! He is coming to speak to me."

The King detached himself from a small group of friends and crossed the room towards Samara, who had risen to his feet.

"A most amazing meeting!" the former exclaimed, holding out his hand. "You are on your way home from America, I presume?"

"I landed this evening, your Majesty," Samara replied.

"You will accept my heartiest congratulations on the success of your mission," the King begged. "But what about my cousins? What will they have to say to your altruistic efforts?"

Samara shook his head.

"One can but hope," he said, "that they will appreciate the advance of the inevitable."

The King smiled.

"I fancy that you will find General von Hartsen rather a handful," he remarked. "He has been here waiting for you for days, fuming like a madman most of the time. Present the young lady, if you please."

"With your Majesty's permission," Samara replied. "Miss Catherine Borans, my temporary secretary —

the King of Gothland. Miss Borans has been good enough to replace Andrew Kroupki, who was taken ill in New York."

The King bowed and held out his hand.

"To be secretary to Mr. Samara," he said, "is to stand behind the curtains of the diplomatic world. I congratulate you, Miss Borans."

"I find the work exceedingly interesting, your Majesty," she observed.

The King looked at her curiously.

"You are American?" he enquired.

"I have lived there most of my life," she answered.

"It is curious," he continued. "You have a family likeness to some friends of mine. You stay here for long, Mr. Samara?"

"Perhaps four days, sir," was the reluctant reply.

"I am at the Hôtel de Londres," the King announced. "If you have the leisure, please sign your name in my book."

He bowed to Catherine, nodded to Samara and passed on. The two resumed their seats.

"I am quite sure," the former said demurely, "that Miss Loyes would have come up to your room herself if she had realised that it might mean a trip to Europe and an introduction to a King."

"There is worse to come," Samara muttered, glancing apprehensively at two approaching figures. "I thought this fellow, at any rate, was never going to speak to me again."

General von Hartsen clicked his heels, bowed and held out his hand.

"Mr. Samara," he said, "my young friend here desires the advantage of a personal acquaintance with you. Will you pardon my taking this opportunity? Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern — Mr. Samara."

Samara studied the young man with interest as he shook hands. The latter smiled frankly.

"My name may convey to such a world-famed democrat as you, sir," he observed, "unpleasant reminiscences. I have resumed my title, it is true, but I am a German citizen and a faithful subject of the Republic. I work in a bank. The General tells me that you have just arrived from New York."

"This afternoon," Samara assented.

"You will do me the honour, perhaps," Prince Frederick continued, "of presenting me to the young lady."

Samara acquiesced without comment.

"Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern — Miss Borans of New York."

"Is it possible that you are an American, mademoiselle?" the young prince murmured as he bowed low over her hand.

"I have lived there all my life," Catherine assured him.

"And this is your first visit to Monte Carlo?"

"My first visit to Europe."

"It is amazing," he murmured. "You stay for some time here, I hope?"

Catherine was imbibing the atmosphere of diplomacy.

"It is uncertain," she replied.

"You will permit me, perhaps," he ventured, with another bow, "to show you the rooms? Mr. Samara will not object?" he added, turning to the latter.

"By all means."

The two young people strolled off together, without waiting for Samara's somewhat surprised acceptance of the situation. General von Hartsen watched them critically.

"Magnificent!" he exclaimed. "The blue-blooded aristocracy of the east and the red-blooded aristocracy

of the west. Mademoiselle is doubtless the daughter of one of these great American millionaires."

"Mademoiselle's income, so far as I know," Samara replied drily, "is thirty dollars a week, the salary I pay her. She happens to be my secretary. I should perhaps have mentioned the fact."

CHAPTER XVI

"WHAT the hell's this?" Samara demanded, as he entered the salon on the following morning and found a cardboard box the size of a washing basket on the table.

"Roses," Catherine replied, raising her head from the interior which she had been examining. "The most wonderful I have ever seen in my life. For me, too! And from a prince! I'm glad I came to Europe!"

"A prince who is also a bank clerk!" Samara scoffed. "Believe me, the world has finished with princes."

"This one was very pleasant," Catherine confided. "He invited me to spend the greater part of to-day with him."

"You told him you were going to London, of course?" Samara asked quickly.

"I certainly did not. Ought I to have done so? I rather thought that was between you and me."

Samara nodded his approval.

"They wouldn't suspect you of being a real envoy," he observed. "That is one reason why I am sending you. Still, there is no need to run unnecessary risks. You have had your coffee?"

"An hour ago," she answered, "and packed my things, and walked on the Terrace."

"With your princeling?"

She shook her head.

"He was invisible," she sighed. "Of course it may have been that he didn't know that I was going to be there. He spoke of a party at the Carlton last night, wherever that may be. Perhaps he was late."

"Perhaps he was," Samara agreed.

"It seems a little unfortunate," she murmured, as she poured out the coffee, "that I am leaving Monte Carlo so soon. I was never so great a success at the Hotel Weltmore in New York. On my first day here, a king has told me that I reminded him of some friends of his, and a prince has invited me to luncheon and sent me roses."

"Just as well you're leaving," Samara growled. "Your head would soon be turned."

"I am very well balanced," she assured him.

"How about your memory?" he asked. "I hope your flirtatious successes haven't driven the serious matters out of your head altogether."

"Absolutely," she confessed. "What am I going to London for? I am sure I don't know."

"In that case you had better stay behind," he suggested gruffly.

She laughed in derision.

"My dear master," she said, "there isn't a word or a point of the whole thing that isn't in my brain. As an envoy I'm going to be the greatest success of modern times. I shall be irresistibly logical, delicately persuasive. What sort of a man is the British Prime Minister, please?"

"A married man with a large family and serious views," Samara warned her, "and as for politics he is as sincere a democrat as I am."

"I won't expound my little hobbies about government then," she promised. "What a pity you aren't coming with me."

"If I could make the journey," he replied coldly, "there would be no need for you to go."

"I hope you won't get into trouble here while I'm away," she sighed. "It really is a most attractive place."

"There is seldom any trouble here except of one's own making," was the somewhat curt rejoinder. "Monte Carlo is a sort of sanctuary for all the criminals of the world. They meet here and exchange notes, but they look upon it as a sort of neutral ground. To attempt evil against a man in Monte Carlo is almost a breach of etiquette."

He accompanied her presently to the railway station. Her bag had been sent on and they walked through the gardens, bathed in sunshine, along the Terrace and waited a few moments for the lift. Catherine, humming softly to herself from sheer despair at her companion's silence, was looking amazingly beautiful. It was as though all the youth of her nature had responded to the entrancing change in the conditions of her life. In her neat travelling dress, with a great bunch of the roses in her hand and her almost lizard-like absorption of the glinting sunshine, she seemed to have imbibed with it the joyous spirit of her surroundings and the passing hour. The drabness of cities and of cramped labour were things utterly discarded. She was a young princess of the coming day; eager yet gracious. Samara, on the contrary, was not altogether at his best. His clothes, as was often the case, needed brushing, his hair and chin needed the services of a barber. There was a streak of red in his eyes, too, and a shadow underneath them, as though the night had gone ill with him. Catherine, as the lift rattled up, paused in her humming and looked at him critically.

"Were you late last night?" she enquired.

"Moderately. I had a great many despatches to read."

"You had no bad news from Moscow?"

He shook his head.

"None at all. Politically everything seems to be

reasonably quiet. It is from outside all the disturbance will come for some time. Our own people have scarcely realised yet the change which has come into their lives."

They were alone in the lift. She drew a little nearer to him.

"You are afraid of Germany, perhaps?"

He brushed aside the suggestion scornfully with a wave of his hand.

"I am afraid of no one," he answered. "A certain clique of statesmen in Germany will be furious and will start an agitation against us. I doubt whether they will do any good. As I have already warned you, they will watch London closely. That is why I prefer to send you there in this manner, without letters or documents, rather than to make you the bearer of any written proposition."

"You are placing a great trust in me," she reflected, as they watched the approach of the train.

"There is no success in life possible for any one who has not learned to trust," he declared.

The train came thundering in. Catherine's seat was found without difficulty. Samara stood in the corridor for a moment, looking in at her.

"You are a strange person," she said, holding out her hand, "rather a bully and terribly unreasonable sometimes, but I shall be glad to see you again. Promise me that I may come back here, that you will not send word for me to go direct to Moscow or anything of that sort."

He smiled.

"A statesman is always at the mercy of circumstances," he reminded her, "but the Duma is not summoned to meet until the week after next and my arrival in Moscow before then would be premature. I think

you may take it that I shall be here, awaiting your return on Saturday night."

He backed away at the last urgent call and stood on the platform whilst the train rolled out. There was nothing to be seen of Catherine, and he gazed carelessly into the passing windows. Suddenly he gave a start. A young man who had boarded the train at the last moment was leaning breathlessly down from the platform of his car, waving his hand to a friend. As he recognised them, Samara's frown grew blacker. An entirely new and unwelcome sensation sent him back to the hotel with a curse upon his lips.

Catherine was by no means a secretive person, but she had received a letter that morning of which she had said nothing to Samara. As soon as the train had started she took it from her handbag, spread it out and reread it, a smile of amusement upon her lips. It was dated from the Hôtel de Paris on the preceding night:

MADEMOISELLE!

The roses which I shall send you to-morrow as soon as the shops are opened bring too tardy a message. I cannot rest to-night without sending you a line to beg for your gracious permission to see you at the earliest possible opportunity, to assure you that since the moment we met, only a few hours ago, every other thought has been driven from my mind, every other woman's face into which I have ever looked has become a blank. Please believe in my sincerity as I believe in you. There is no one so adorable in the world!

Forgive my presumption! It comes from a heart overfull! I count the minutes until I shall see you again!

FREDERICK.

The smile deepened. Catherine laughed softly to herself. She tore the letter into small pieces, held her hand

out of the window and let them go fluttering by. Then, whilst her handbag was open she looked at herself in the little mirror, handled her powder puff lightly for a moment, closed the bag and leaned back in her place. For a time she watched with interest the unfamiliar landscape. Presently, however, she yawned, closed her eyes and dozed. She was awakened by the soft opening of the door of her compartment. She sat up and recognised the intruder with amazement.

"Prince Frederick!" she exclaimed.

He held out his hand.

"Please not," he begged earnestly. "Even if you are angry with me let it be 'Frederick.' I am not — not exactly supposed to be here."

"I should think not," she agreed with decision. "Why are you?"

He closed the door and with some diffidence took the seat opposite to hers.

"For the reason, mademoiselle," he confessed, "that I tried to express in my letter."

"But this is absurd," she protested. "I am going to England."

"I know it," he answered. "So am I."

She looked at him for a moment steadfastly. Then she glanced out of the window.

"You did not mention your intention yesterday," she said.

"I had no idea of it myself," he assured her.

"Do you wish me to understand that I am in any way connected with your journey?" she asked.

"I beg of you not to be angry, mademoiselle," he rejoined almost humbly. "You are the sole cause of it."

"Then, if you will allow me to tell you so," she said deliberately, "I think that you are mad."

"I think so myself," he acknowledged. "I thought

so all night. I have thought so every moment since we first met. But it is, after all, a glorious madness."

She looked at him again steadily. He was a personable young man, dressed in grey tweeds cut after the English fashion, with shiny brown shoes of the shade she liked, fine linen and a well-chosen tie. His features were good, if a little over-reminiscent of an unpopular ancestry. There was weakness in his face but nothing much that was bad. So far as it was possible for any one to judge, he seemed to be in earnest.

"Would it cure you," she enquired, "if I told you that this madness of which you speak is not in the least reciprocated?"

"That would be too much to hope for," he admitted. "I am content to wait. I have not had a chance to speak to you seriously."

"Seriously? How on earth could you be more serious?" she demanded.

He hesitated. He had sufficient tact to be aware that he was on delicate ground. Young American ladies, he knew, were used to a great deal of freedom, and this one had doubtless been a little spoiled. It was scarcely a case for rushing tactics.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "the idea of my devotion is a new one to you. You have not accustomed yourself to it. Will you remember at least that we do not meet as strangers? I may claim the privileges of a travelling companion?"

"I suppose there is nothing to prevent your doing that," she acquiesced, "but I might point out that the remaining three seats in this compartment have been engaged in my name."

"I shall leave according to your instructions, mademoiselle," he promised. "The whole of the corresponding compartment next door is mine."

Catherine began to laugh to herself. He watched her questioningly.

"You see it is my first visit to Europe," she explained. "I had no idea that such things as this really happened."

"Far more wonderful things than this happen," he assured her earnestly. "Your American men, mademoiselle — pardon me, but they have no sentiment. They would not throw convention to the winds as I have done — abandoned all my engagements to follow the person whom I adore on the merest chance of a kindly word, to the one city in the world which I detest."

"I'm not so sure," she reflected. "Some of these American young men are fairly rapid."

He shook his head.

"They are not capable of sentiment so intense," he declared.

"The one I am engaged to is quite headstrong when he is roused," Catherine remarked.

Prince Frederick glanced at her with a flash in his blue eyes which made him seem almost like a man.

"Engaged! You engaged!" he cried. "That is nothing."

"My young man thinks that it's a great deal," she observed. "He very much disliked my coming to Europe. He's on his way over here now."

"Who is he? What is he?" Prince Frederick demanded. "I must know all about him."

"He is called Nicholas," she confided, "and he is — well, he's very much what you are."

"A banker!" her companion exclaimed. "But that is only a blind. I have taken a position in commerce so as to establish myself as a German citizen."

"You have other ideas?" she asked him curiously.

He pulled himself up.

"That is of no account," he replied. "When does this young man arrive? You're not going to England to meet him?"

"I don't even know what boat he is on," she declared.

The blue-liveried steward paused for a moment at the door with his customary announcement.

"*Le déjeuner est servi, madame et monsieur.*"

Prince Frederick rose to his feet.

"You will at least do me the great honour of lunching with me, mademoiselle?" he begged.

"I think I may go so far without indiscretion," she assented.

CHAPTER XVII

CATHERINE's first impressions of England were delightful ones. She sat in the very comfortable armchair of a well-hung Pullman and looked out upon a patchwork country of tender greens, of woods bottomed with bluebells, of spinneys and railway banks yellow with primroses, and orchards in which pink, waxy blossoms were already beginning to form. She was far too interested to notice the almost savage gloom of the young man who sat in the opposite chair.

"Mademoiselle Catherine," he exclaimed at last.

She turned reluctantly away from the sun-bathed panorama of fertile country.

"My name is 'Miss Borans,'" she told him. "I do not appreciate the use of my christian name."

"You are brutal," he declared.

She looked at him without kindness, scarcely even with friendliness.

"You are a very absurd and spoilt young man," she said. "You seem to fancy yourself aggrieved because I am not able to reciprocate in any way your very ridiculous feeling for me. You have no common sense. It is rather I who should be aggrieved. I did not encourage you to follow me. For the small services you have rendered me upon the train and the boat, I am much obliged, but I should have preferred being without them. If you wish to remain on terms of friendship or acquaintance with me, please abandon that expression and talk like a reasonable human being."

His face showed no signs of lightening. He seemed indeed thoroughly dejected and miserable.

"Why are you so cruel?" he begged. "Why can

you not be just a little kinder? What is there about me repugnant?"

"You're not in the least repugnant to me," she assured him. "You simply do not interest me very much, and so far as my affections are concerned, they are engaged elsewhere."

He watched the flying landscape for a moment, as though he hated the speed it indicated. For the hundredth time he tried to find courage.

"I've always heard that you American girls are so practical," he said. "Why should you remain the secretary of a man like Samara? I am very rich, mademoiselle. I am very fond of travel. It is not my intention to marry for years. Reasons which I cannot confide to you forbid it. There are secondary titles belonging to some of my estates. I always thought that sort of thing appealed to Americans," he mumbled as a gleam in her eyes almost froze the words upon his lips.

"They tell me that you have reëstablished duelling in Germany. Is it true?" she asked.

"It is true," he admitted.

"I have a friend in America," she went on, "who is on his way over here now, who is supposed to be a very expert swordsman. I fancy that I failed to grasp your meaning just now. We are perhaps a little out of sympathy. I propose to read."

She buried herself in an illustrated paper. Her companion rose to his feet, kicked a footstool out of his way, and with scowling face retreated into the smoking car. He ordered a drink and threw himself into a vacant chair.

"A little American typist!" he muttered. "A typist from the Hotel Weltmore!"

He struck the table with his fist. The few people in the car looked up in surprise. He only scowled.

"I want that drink," he shouted to the steward.

At Victoria Catherine smiled at him quite pleasantly, but she had already engaged a porter. As she was stepping into the taxicab, however, to which he insisted upon escorting her, she vouchsafed a few disconcerting words of farewell.

"You can tell your little friend," she said, "or General von Hartsen's friend, that I am very much obliged for the careful way he handled my belongings when he searched my bag, and you can also congratulate him upon his amazing stealthiness when he entered my compartment last night and went through my luggage. I should like to know where he got his master key from."

"I do not know what you are talking about," the young man exclaimed.

"That is possibly true," she admitted. "At the same time, the fact remains that I hate spies. You can also tell him this, that for the whole of the sixty seconds he was in my compartment, he was on the brink of eternity. I had a small revolver pointed at him through the bars of my bedstead and I am not sufficiently used to firearms for my finger to be absolutely steady upon the trigger, especially when one is travelling at fifty miles an hour."

"If what you have suggested has really happened," Prince Frederick declared eagerly, "I promise you ——"

"You need promise me nothing," she interrupted. "I suppose if I undertake a political mission I must risk the consequences. I am only surprised that people think this sort of thing worth while nowadays. But let me tell you this," she concluded, leaning out of the taxicab window, "when the door first opened last night and I saw the covered light of the torch, I thought that it was you, and if I hadn't realised that it wasn't the

second I did — well, I was too close to have missed. Good-bye!"

"A damned little American typist!" Prince Frederick muttered once more under his breath as the taxicab rolled off.

Catherine drove to a small hotel in a quiet but fashionable neighbourhood where she found a room reserved and a letter awaiting her, the latter a formidable-looking document, in a large square envelope, with a coat of arms at the back. She tore it open and read:

Downing Street,
April 21st.

DEAR MADAM:

The Prime Minister desires me to say that he has heard from Mr. Samara of your presence in London and, should you wish for an interview with him, he will be at liberty at five o'clock this afternoon, or at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning.

He asks me in the meantime to suggest that if by any chance the nature of your mission, if any, should have been mentioned and you should be approached by representatives of the Press, it would be as well for you to preserve the strictest secrecy as to any communications you may have to make.

Faithfully yours, dear madam,
FRANK S. PEACOCK,
Private Secretary.

Catherine glanced at the clock, summoned a maid and ordered a bath. In an hour's time she descended into the small lounge of the hotel. She was accosted immediately by a page boy carrying an enormous bunch of flowers.

"I am taking these up to your room, madam," he announced. "The gentleman who left them is over there."

Prince Frederick stepped eagerly forward. He was immaculately dressed in town clothes and he carried a silk hat and cane in his hand. His expression was anxious and woebegone. He had decided to change his tactics.

"I have ventured to call," he said, "to beg for your forgiveness in case you should have misunderstood anything I said this afternoon."

"Very well," she conceded after a moment's silence, "I am willing to believe that it was, as you suggest, a misunderstanding."

"You are alone here," he went on eagerly. "You do not know London. I, on the other hand, am well acquainted with it. Permit me the great honour of offering you dinner and escorting you to a theatre. I assure you that I will say nothing which could possibly offend, or even embarrass you."

Catherine hesitated. She was, after all, as fond of a good dinner and a theatre as any girl of her age, and her hotel, though highly respectable, had a museum-like appearance. The young man saw her hesitation and hastened to pursue his advantage.

"Madame Ronet is singing at the opera," he announced, "or there are two good musical comedies. If you would not mind dining early we could have supper afterwards, and perhaps dance if you care about it. I shall promise to be nothing but your attentive and most respectful cavalier."

"Very well then," she assented graciously. "If you will find out from the hotel people at what time I have returned from the visit I am about to pay, I will be ready in an hour after that."

She passed on with a gracious little nod and entered the taxi which the hall porter had called for her.

"Where to, madam?" the man asked.

"To the Houses of Parliament," she directed at random.

The man started off. At the corner of the street she put her head out of the window.

"Number ten Downing Street, please," she told him.

CHAPTER XVIII

A VERY alert and polite young secretary, who had met Catherine in the hall, took her at once into the presence of his Chief, Mr. Phillip Rossiter, erstwhile Foreign Minister, and now Premier of England. Mr. Rossiter was a middle-aged man of quiet introspective manner. He welcomed his visitor with easy cordiality, and if he felt any surprise at her appearance he effectually concealed it.

"My friend Samara has already written to me the circumstances to which I owe the pleasure of this visit," he said, as he settled himself comfortably in an easy-chair opposite to hers. "Andrew Kroupki would have come, of course, but for his unfortunate illness. A very brilliant young man, that. I met him when I visited Moscow three years ago."

"Mr. Kroupki would have come no doubt with wider discretion," Catherine remarked. "I am sure you understand that I am here only as a messenger."

"Quite so," the other murmured. "All great men have their hobbies and aversions, and Samara's particular aversion has always been documents and diplomatic correspondence. We have come to an excellent understanding many times through an interchange of visits. I hope Mr. Samara has told you to talk to me quite frankly. I know all about his visit to America — in fact, I am not at all sure that I did not put the idea into his head."

"Mr. Samara has told me certain things," Catherine acknowledged. "He has given me a certain insight into the arrangements he has made and why he has made them. Then he has gone on to tell me that whatever

I know I may tell you. So you see I shall reply quite openly to any questions you ask me concerning his success in America. But I must warn you to start with that I am a newcomer, a stranger to all matters of diplomacy. I know nothing, even, of Mr. Samara's Government. Considering that I have been working for him assiduously during the last three weeks, it is amazing how little I know of him."

The Premier smiled. The subject of Samara was one which always interested him.

"Your Chief is one of the remarkable men of this generation," he declared. "Fifteen years ago Bolshevism seemed to have its fangs deep into the very heart of Russia. It didn't seem possible for any one to prevail against it. Samara has worked miracles. To-day Russia is, if not entirely herself again, well on the way towards reconstruction. Financially, industrially and economically she is making gigantic strides. Samara is daring, but he has the right ideas. Russia will be one of the great powers again long before his work is at an end. Personally — I have told Samara this myself — I see but one danger, and that is his tendency towards idealism. It is a great thing to mount the ladder, but one should set one's feet upon the rungs with care."

Catherine looked at her host intently.

"You don't believe in this demobilisation scheme?" she asked quickly.

"Theoretically, I think it wonderful," he answered. "Tell me — I think I know, but still tell me — the Washington visit was a success?"

"Absolutely," she assured him. "Mr. Samara granted certain concessions and he has arranged for a loan of two hundred million dollars. The whole of the Third Army will be demobilised within six months and employment will be found for every soldier."

"Have you any idea as to the feeling amongst the militarists?" he enquired.

"So far as the Third Army is concerned, the men are perfectly willing to submit to disbandment," she replied. "The officers are mostly German and they resent it. Still, Mr. Samara is very much in earnest. They will have to go, as the works are established, the mines opened and the machinery being shipped."

The Premier looked at his visitor with interest.

"You seem to have a very sound grasp of this subject, considering your recent connection with it," he said. "Are you an American, might I ask?"

She smiled.

"I was born in Russia," she admitted. "I have lived in America, however, all my life. It is my knowledge of Russian, of course, which has given me the opportunity to be of so much use to Mr. Samara."

He continued to study her with curiosity.

"Your people were amongst the refugees?"

"Yes."

The Premier turned to some papers by his side. Something in Catherine's tone told him that, so far as she was concerned, that subject was at an end.

"What have you to say to me, Miss Borans?" he asked succinctly.

"Mr. Samara desires me to present this subject for your consideration," she said. "England was a heavy loser at the time of the Russian *débâcle*. There are many works and industries still languishing which were started with English capital and upon which he considers England still has a claim. It is his wish to demobilise as well as the Third also the whole of the Second Army. He therefore needs — it is Russia's greatest need to-day — a further development of her resources. He asks if you will appoint a committee of business men,

preferably those connected with the various enterprises in which English shareholders have lost money, and send them over to treat with him in Moscow."

"To what end?" Mr. Rossiter enquired.

"To arrange with them," she continued, "for further considerable advances which will enable many of the industries and works which have been closed down to be reopened. Mr. Samara does not pretend that he will be able to pay in full those debts incurred in the days of the monarchy and ignored — in fact, repudiated altogether — by the Bolshevists. He considers, however, that some sort of a fund ——"

"A sinking fund," Mr. Rossiter suggested.

"That is the term he used," Catherine acquiesced, — "could be established, so that in time a portion of the old debt could be repaid to English creditors by means of the renewal of the particular industries in which their money had been lost. They would, of course, in the meantime, be making the profits to which they were entitled on the new business."

"I see," the Premier murmured. "I gather from the nature of these suggestions that there is very little unemployment in Russia."

"Scarcely any," she assured him. "Nearly every industry is flourishing. All that the farmers need is more machinery and more workers. Mr. Samara has pointed out to me that the trouble in the demobilisation of these armies is that quite half of the men are not attracted by the idea of working upon the land. That is why it is so necessary to provide them with other means of earning a livelihood."

"I quite understand," Mr. Rossiter said. "Did your Chief suggest any particular enterprises connected with previous British undertakings?"

She drew a paper from her handbag.

"Here is the list, sir," she pointed out, "of industries brought to a standstill during the Bolshevist epoch, all of them launched in the first instance with British capital, which Mr. Samara thinks might be reconstituted. It is the only document I have brought with me."

Mr. Rossiter adjusted his eyeglass and read down the list. Then he rose to his feet and consulted for some time with his secretary who was writing at the further end of the room. Presently he returned to his place.

"I cannot, of course, give you a definite reply, Miss Borans," he said. "But my impression is that there would not be the slightest difficulty in launching this scheme and finding the capital required. When do you return to Russia?"

"I am leaving here on Friday morning, sir," she told him, "to rejoin Mr. Samara at Monte Carlo."

"Between now and then," Mr. Rossiter promised her, "you shall have the names of the committee I suggest and approximately the amount which the Government will be likely to vote by way of a subsidy. I have now a question to ask you, the reply to which may not be in your scale of information. What military force does your Chief intend to retain under arms?"

"I know nothing definite," Catherine replied, "but I believe that it is Mr. Samara's idea to do away with the whole of the military establishment of Russia."

Mr. Rossiter fingered his penholder.

"Your Chief," he remarked, "does not believe in war."

"Not against Russia, at any rate," she assented. "He considers that Russia is geographically impregnable. Apart from that, he considers that the folly of warfare has been proved. I have heard him say that the campaign of nineteen-fourteen–nineteen-twenty

was more disastrous to the allies who won it than to the German Empire who lost it."

"Perfectly sound," Mr. Rossiter agreed. "The trouble of it is we have all learnt something since then. I don't mind telling you this," he went on. "If the Germans had been victorious, they would have found means of making England and France pay. They would never have been gulled by this higher economic doctrine and gone without their booty. To-day if there were war and Germany won, I have not the faintest doubt that she would know how to extract every penny of what she considered due to her and get full advantage of her victory."

"I do not understand economics," Catherine confessed. "I only know that Mr. Samara does not fear anything of the sort."

The Premier was silent for several moments. When he spoke again he seemed almost to be talking to himself.

"Samara is right up to a certain point," he declared. "The German Republic is not out for war. The Germans know very well that the first breath of it would bring them internal division. To us, who watch such things closely, however, there are very dangerous symptoms in German politics. We should not be surprised any day to hear of a monarchical plot."

"But Germany is so prosperous under present conditions," she murmured.

"Precisely," the other rejoined. "But there is nothing breeds discontent quicker than undue prosperity. You must remember, too, that the racial and fundamental temperament of a nation can never be changed. Russia, France and Germany, all three of them, have the instinct amongst their peasants and *bourgeoisie* for monarchical government. So far as France and Russia

are concerned, at any rate, I think that they are right. The Frenchman is too easily swayed. So long as he believes he is a part of the government, he is all the time tearing his hair and changing his mind. That sort of person always makes a loyal and submissive subject. The Russian peasant is in the same position for a different reason. He doesn't want his liberty. He doesn't want to be made to think for himself. He wants to be taken care of. He, too, wants to be ruled. Germany, I must admit, I am not so sure about. The German martial instinct seems to me to be the one great thing which might call back a Kaiser."

"Who would he be?" Catherine asked curiously.

"Without a doubt, Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern," was the prompt reply. "He is the youngest son of the late Crown Prince and by far the most popular — reminds one rather of our own King, when he was young — a sportsman, a ladies' man, a democrat and a ruler. I don't know much about Prince Frederick, of course, although he manages to keep himself pretty well in the limelight, but I do believe that he is nursing the monarchy — playing to the people all the time."

"Am I to tell Mr. Samara from you that you think he had better leave that First Army alone?" she asked bluntly.

Mr. Rossiter took a cigarette from a box by his side and tapped it thoughtfully.

"My advice to your very distinguished Chief would be to watch internal Germany," he said. "I quite agree with him that the German Republic is not bellicose. On the other hand, a German monarchy would at once seek to justify its existence by a war. Samara knows as much about this, though, as I do. Let him deal with the Third and Second Armies as he will. I think I can safely promise him that the commission I send

over to Moscow will be able to start industries which will absorb the whole of the surplus labour."

Catherine rose to her feet. The Prime Minister followed suit.

"I am happy to have had the pleasure of receiving you, Miss Borans," he declared. "Tell Mr. Samara from me that I greatly approve of his new diplomatic methods. You propose to remain in London, I understand, until Friday. Is there any way in which we can be of service to you?"

"None whatever, thank you," she replied frankly. "I have never been in London before. I shall very much enjoy doing a little exploring on my own account."

"I sympathise with you entirely," Mr. Rossiter concluded. "We will show you our greatest kindness — kindness in this instance, because it is a real deprivation — by leaving you alone. Present my compliments to your Chief and don't forget that one word of warning — watch for a monarchist plot in Berlin. I do not need to tell him to protect himself in Moscow. Peacock, show Miss Borans to her car."

CHAPTER XIX

Catherine, with the major part of her mission successfully accomplished, devoted herself, with an abandon which at times amazed her companion, to the spending of a thoroughly frivolous evening. They dined exceedingly well at Maridge's, saw the last two acts of a popular musical comedy and went on to a select and fashionable club restaurant, where dancing was already in full swing. During the whole of the evening, Prince Frederick's behaviour was entirely correct. He had adopted the attitude of the wistful but silent lover. He devoted himself entirely to telling his companion the names of the various notabilities by whom they were surrounded and relating anecdotes about some of them. With regard to himself he spoke scarcely at all and he did not ask her a single question concerning her mission to London. On the three or four occasions when he was greeted or addressed by acquaintances his manner was genial and full of bonhomie. Catherine watched him with amusement.

"You seem to have a good many acquaintances over here," she remarked.

"I was at Eton for two terms and Oxford for a year," he reminded her. "I have made it my business to understand something of English life and English people."

"With what object?" she asked him point-blank.

His smile for a moment seemed almost sinister.

"We disinherited ones of the world," he answered, "have to keep friends with everybody. Unless I am strictly incognito I keep away from the Court, of course.

I was known over here as Frederick von Burhl, the name under which I started my commercial career in Berlin after leaving school. That is eight years ago, however, and to-day the prejudices against the aristocracy have declined."

"Do you believe," she enquired, "that imperialism is dead in Germany?"

He raised his eyebrows slightly.

"Is that a question which I could possibly answer?" he protested. "Especially to the confidential secretary of one of the world's great democrats."

She laughed.

"Please don't think that I have designs upon your secrets if you have any," she begged. "I asked merely for curiosity. There was an article in one of the reviews I read on the steamer in which it spoke of a reawakening of the monarchical impulse in Russia, Germany and even France."

"The writer was, I should think, well-informed," Prince Frederick answered cautiously. "I believe the impulse is there. That is why Samara shows so much more than appears on the surface in setting himself to destroy the militarism of his country. A standing army is always on the monarchical side."

Catherine's attention was suddenly diverted by an amazing occurrence. She, like most others in the room, was watching the entrance of two people who were being received with every mark of distinction. One was a very beautiful woman, wearing a Russian headdress and amazing jewellery. The young man with her, to Catherine's bewilderment, was Nicholas.

Catherine laid her hand on her companion's coat sleeve.

"Please tell me who these are?" she whispered.

Prince Frederick leaned forward. The woman

seemed to be watching for a sign from him. His expression remained stony.

"That is Adèle Fédorleys, the ballet dancer," he confided. "She is half a Pole and half a Russian. Her companion I do not know."

"I do," Catherine exclaimed in delight, as she watched the blank amazement in Nicholas' face change to pale fury. "He is quite a friend of mine."

"A Russian himself, by the look of him," Prince Frederick observed. "Tell me," he went on curiously, turning towards his companion, "how is it that you, who describe yourself as an American typist engaged by Mr. Samara from the Weltmore Hotel Secretarial Bureau, are acquainted with a young man in this country who is in a position to know and entertain Madame Fédorleys?"

"A quaint coincidence," she admitted. "Almost as quaint as the fact that you two should be in the same room. That is the young man I spoke of ——"

She broke off suddenly. Nicholas, having escorted his companion to their table, was crossing the room towards them.

"He is much bigger than I," Prince Frederick whispered. "I am terrified!"

"You are safe — here," she laughed. "I may have to smuggle you out the back way when you leave."

The young man who had come to a standstill before the table certainly presented a somewhat formidable appearance. He seemed to have grown in stature and importance since he had left New York. The pastiness of his complexion was gone — replaced by a touch of becoming sunburn. His burly shoulders, closely cropped hair and a certain heaviness of feature suggested, in an indeterminate sort of way, the professional pugilist, an impression, however, which was modified by

the keenness of his blue eyes, the levelness of his eyebrows and a certain breadth of forehead. He bowed very low and raised Catherine's fingers to his lips. Then he spoke to her hurriedly in Russian, his voice thick with anger.

"What is this? How is it that I find you here in London, alone with this young man? Samara is in Monte Carlo. I have news of him."

"Contain yourself, my dear Nicholas," she answered in the same language. "I am here on an errand for Mr. Samara, and my companion is an acquaintance whom you will be glad to know."

There was nothing in Nicholas' face to indicate any prospective pleasure. His expression was indeed forbidding in the extreme. Catherine turned to her escort and spoke in English.

"This," she said, "is a most extraordinary meeting. The strangest part of it, perhaps, is that you two should never have met and that it should be left to an insignificant person like myself to make you acquainted. Which takes precedence, I wonder? Such things are a mystery to me in my station of life, so I must take my chance. This is Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern, better known in this country as Frederick von Burhl — Prince Nicholas Imanoff, whom I knew in New York as Mr. Ronoff."

Prince Frederick had risen to his feet. The two young men, after a moment or two of blank surprise, looked at each other with very natural curiosity. Then Nicholas extended his hand.

"I should have recognised you by your pictures," he said.

"And I you by your likeness to your House," was the courteous reply. "I understood that you had settled down in New York."

"There is only one country in which I shall ever settle down," Nicholas answered with some dignity. "I am on my way to visit it now."

"You are allowed to enter Russia!" Frederick exclaimed.

"At Samara's invitation. It is humiliating but it is still a generous action. A great friend of my House, Kirdorff of Riga, is with me in London. My aunt, the Grand Duchess, and various others of my friends and relatives are following me by the French route."

"This is wonderful news," Frederick remarked. "Samara is a brave man, though. It seems to me that he has chosen a curious time to give you permission to return. I should like very much to talk to you, Nicholas. You will pass through Germany on your way to Russia. I should like you to meet some friends of mine."

"You have already, I see, met one of mine," Nicholas observed.

"I have met in Monte Carlo this young lady, calling herself Miss Borans, the private secretary of the Russian President," Frederick replied eagerly. "Her story is that she came from a typists' office in New York."

Catherine shrugged her shoulders. A faint smile flitted across her lips.

"After all, it does not perhaps matter very much," she observed. "You had better present me, Nicholas."

The latter turned to Frederick.

"You have the honour," he said, "to have made the acquaintance of the Princess Catherine of Russia, hereditary Grand Duchess of Urulsk. The Princess, I may add, is my fiancée."

"I was," Catherine murmured sweetly, "but that young lady over there will take a great deal of explanation. I have lived so long in America that I have

imbibed the *bourgeois* view as to proceedings of this sort."

An angry light flashed for a moment in Nicholas' eyes.

"The young lady is a fellow countrywoman and a great patriot," he said. "You remind me of my duty as host. I will return."

He bowed and turned away. Catherine watched him with a smile. The whole episode had appealed to her immensely. It was the young American woman who leaned back in her seat and laughed.

"Some shock for poor Nicholas!" she exclaimed.

"And for me!" Frederick groaned.

"I have been an idiot," Frederick declared bitterly, towards the close of the evening.

Catherine smiled with amused tolerance.

"I do not think that you are to be blamed," she conceded. "Why should you not believe what you are told? Besides, it is quite true that I am a typist. Not one of us out there had any money. Nicholas himself was selling bonds for a Wall Street stockbroker, and Alexandrina earned a few dollars making artificial roses. My engagement by Mr. Samara and my coming to Europe were entirely matters of chance."

"It is true," he demanded, "that you are betrothed to Nicholas?"

"It is perfectly true," she acknowledged, "only I am not at all sure that I shall marry him."

"You must not," was the low reply. "You must marry me."

She turned to answer him with a jest and was amazed at his expression. He was very pale and his eyes seemed to have sunken. The hand which clutched his wineglass was shaking.

"I have thought of nobody else since the first mo-

ment I saw you," he went on. "You have driven everything else from my mind. I followed you here to London blindly. I never dared hope that this might be possible. Now I realise that it is. It does not matter about money. I have plenty and who knows, there may be a great future for us."

She listened for a moment to the music, gazing a little absently across the room. She had the air of looking through the walls into space. For a moment, indeed, her thoughts had strayed to the city of her dreams as it had been pictured to her, with its gilded roofs, its palaces and its hovels side by side.

"There is a chance of that, too, for Nicholas," she murmured.

"His chance is nothing to mine," Frederick insisted harshly. "For me the ground has been prepared, year by year and month by month. We have machinery at work. The time is close at hand. For Nicholas there are nothing but dreams. We have no Samara in Germany."

She rose to her feet.

"You are too much in earnest," she whispered. "People are watching you. I believe they guess that you have proposed to me. It is most embarrassing. I insist upon dancing."

His hand as he touched her fingers was cold. No trace of colour returned to his cheeks, even after the exercise.

"Are you not feeling well?" Catherine enquired, as they sat down.

"You can cure me with a word," he answered passionately. "Listen. Give me hope and I will return to Berlin to-morrow. I will send you a welcome from those who count. I will give you proof of what is to come."

"Is it possible that you are really in earnest?" she asked.

"In deadly earnest," he groaned.

Her real nationality suddenly asserted itself. There was a vein of cruelty in her race and it sprang into being. She leaned back in her place and laughed.

CHAPTER XX

Catherine, after she had descended from the train at Monte Carlo, lingered for a moment upon the platform, dazzled by the sunshine. She had left London in a mantle of grey, Paris in a rain and wind storm, and now, after a long night in a *salon-lit*, she seemed to have stepped out into a new world of enchantment. The sea and sky seemed bluer than ever, the houses whiter and cleaner, the great stucco-like Casino more of a joke, resembling rather a child's toy dragged from its play-box than a serious abode of drama, an arena for the most sordid of men's passions. And to add to it all, as she leaned back in her little victoria, the music from the distant orchestra at the Café de Paris came with real sweetness through the scented air. She sat forward and watched the people eagerly as she crossed the square. There was the same atmosphere about them all, a geniality and sense of relaxation which after many years of New York was strangely attractive to her. No one was in a hurry; every one appeared to enjoy not having to be in a hurry. There was plenty of time for the amenities of life.

It was a busy hour at the hotel, but each member of the staff seemed to find leisure to welcome her back after her brief absence. A reception clerk persisted in conducting her upstairs; the lift-boy's smile and bow made her feel that she had come home.

"Mr. Samara is walking on the Terrace with some friends, madam," the clerk announced. "I think that he scarcely expected you until to-morrow."

Catherine nodded.

"I meant to stay in Paris for a day," she explained. "I changed my mind. The weather was intolerable."

"Mademoiselle was wise," the man declared, with a farewell bow. "Yesterday we had rain but to-day, as Mademoiselle sees, it is perfect."

Catherine unfastened her coat and glanced around the room before going to her own apartment. She noticed with tolerant disapproval that it was untidy — a little pile of discarded envelopes upon the table, cigar ash upon the mantelpiece. Suddenly, however, the tolerance faded from her face. On the table was a woman's glove. An odour which she hated became more insistent, — an odour of scented cigarettes. There were some crushed flowers, too, upon the table. She rang the bell and pointed out the state of the room to the chambermaid. The woman smiled as she apologised.

"Monsieur was late last night," she explained. "And he only rose an hour ago. I did not wish to disturb him. I will now do all that is necessary."

Catherine went thoughtfully to her room, changed her clothes, bathed and rested for a time. She was conscious of a curious sense of disappointment and depression for which she could in no way account. She knew perfectly well that the private life of Gabriel Samara was outside her ken. Save for that wild moment on the steamer when he had kissed her — a moment alluded to only once since — not one of his actions towards her or any one else had indicated the slightest interest in her sex. When she had left she was quite sure that he had not a woman acquaintance in the place. And now everything betokened at least the beginning of an intrigue on his part. After all, he was a Russian, a genius, a person of passion and temperament. There was nothing so strange about it, even from the point of view of her strict bringing-up. Sa-

mara, as she told herself, lying on her bed with her hands clasped behind her head, was not of her world. Already she was beginning to realise the great forces which must eventually draw them apart, the grim possibility that her association with him, her knowledge of his affairs, might before long become the measure of her usefulness to her own people, its betrayal the sacrifice she might have to offer to her own future. Was he perhaps in some respects different to her preconceived ideas? He was an idealist without a doubt. His two books on Russia written before his political prominence, every line of which she had read, were supreme evidence of it. But of his private life she knew very little. There was only her own observation and instinct to guide her. In the foreground of the picture of him which had somehow grown up in her mind, that long glove, the crushed flowers, and the scented cigarette tips were like an ugly blur.

When Samara returned from his walk, he found Catherine seated at her typewriter finishing the copying of some reports on which she had been engaged before she had left. The room had been put in order and swept, the windows were wide open. On the table, however, the glove still remained and the little ash-tray of cigarette ends. He banged the door behind him, came over to her side and shook her hand.

"Congratulations, my wonderful emissary," he declared, with one of his rare smiles. "I defied all diplomatic usage and you have justified me. An hour ago I received a cable with the names of the commission. They start on Thursday week."

"I am glad," she said.

He stood away from her for a moment, looking over her head out of the window.

"Everything is now in trim," he continued. "We

leave here on Wednesday. The Duma is summoned for the following Tuesday. I shall announce to the representatives my intentions with regard to the army, issue an authorised edict the following day and commence demobilisation the next week. Your adopted country-people are prompt in their payments. We have already ten millions of American dollars in the Treasury and Argoff, my Minister for Home Affairs, is collecting a staff to open three of the Southern Silver Mines."

"You have no fear, then," she enquired, "but that the Duma will agree with your policy?"

He laughed softly.

"Wait until you have lived a year in Russia," he said, "and you will not ask that question. The Russian of to-day means well enough but he has little mind. The Bolshevists have crushed that. All that he asks is to be led."

"So that you are, in point of fact, almost a dictator," she remarked.

"So much the better for Russia if I am," he answered shortly. "No one knows better what is good for her. No," he went on, "all the opposition will come from outside, and who cares? They think I don't realise it. Idiots!"

She glanced at him questioningly. He walked to the mantelpiece deliberately, struck a match there and lit a cigarette.

"They think I don't know what was at the back of their minds, those others who rattle their war sabres so foolishly!" he exclaimed. "Russian armies, poor patient Russian peasants, trained so zealously and carefully, not for their country's defence but to play the mercenary on foreign soil, to be pushed to the front in dangerous places, that German soldiers might be spared! They are furious here. Von Hartsen scarcely

leaves me. He has tried everything — argument, menace, bribes."

He ceased his restless perambulations and came back to her side. His eyes fell upon the glove and the little ash-tray of cigarette tips. He scowled at them for a moment.

"The evidences of my profligacy," he remarked.

"I had noticed them," Catherine acknowledged. "I am rather sorry that she smokes scented cigarettes."

"Foul things," he assented. "Still, I suppose women must have their whims."

She recommenced her typing. He stopped her with an impatient protest.

"Don't do that," he exclaimed. "It's time for lunch. We'll go out somewhere. Get your hat."

"The persuasiveness of your invitation," she murmured, "almost carries me off my feet."

"Don't be sarcastic," he replied. "I want to talk to you."

"What about?"

He pointed to the glove.

"About that."

Catherine knew that she was losing an opportunity but nevertheless she yielded. She should have laughed at the idea that the presence of the glove might in any way interest her. She did nothing of the sort. She went meekly to her room, put on her most becoming hat and walked by Samara's side across the square.

"So you want to know about the glove, eh?" he demanded.

She looked around at the people sipping their *apéritifs* under the umbrella-tented tables and listened for a moment to the music.

"Does it need an explanation?" she asked. "I suppose you're very much like other men and the atmosphere of this place is a little relaxing."

"Why don't you find it so then?" he demanded. "Nothing seems to change you. From whom did you inherit your magnificent imperturbability?"

She smiled. Her own moment had arrived.

"How you misjudge me!" she sighed. "As a matter of fact, I have been behaving rather badly myself."

"That young princeling," he muttered furiously. "I saw him on the train."

She nodded.

"He came all the way to England entirely on my account," she confided. "Not only that but I supped alone with him at Maridge's in London."

"A nice sort of diplomatic envoy you are," he scoffed. "Did you take him with you to Downing Street?"

"Don't be absurd," she replied. "I devoted to him only my moments of frivolity."

Samara remained for a few moments in a moody silence. They had reached the end of the Arcade and were promptly ushered to a table on the glass-enclosed balcony of the famous restaurant. Catherine took off her gloves, looked out at the sea, listened to a violinist in the street below. Notwithstanding a slight feeling of depression she felt very kindly towards the world.

"The glove belonged to Olga Kansky, première danseuse in the Russian Ballet here," her companion confessed abruptly.

Catherine smiled.

"A Russian!" she exclaimed. "Naturally she had to pay her respects."

"She came for nothing of the sort," he declared brusquely. "She had supper with me here. I invited her to my sitting room afterwards."

There was a slight change in Catherine's manner.

Her tone became almost haughty. She looked at her vis-à-vis with slightly upraised eyebrows.

"There are some situations," she reminded him coldly, "which do not require explanation."

"This one does," he retorted. "Especially to you, as you are in a measure responsible for what happened."

"Surely my own sins," she began ——

"In plain words," he interrupted, "I found that I was thinking a great deal too much about you. I don't want to think too much about any woman, especially one of your type. I have my own theories about the place for women in the world. I meant to carry them out. That is why I invited Olga Kansky to supper."

"And did you — carry them out?" she asked breathlessly.

"No."

"Why not?"

"A ridiculous attack of sentimentality," he confessed. "Just memory — a windy night, the boom of the sea, a moment of accursed opportunity. I wanted to kiss Olga Kansky — I couldn't."

Catherine laughed, without changing a muscle of her face — laughed inwardly, conscious of an unreasonable joy.

"You kissed me quite nicely," she reflected demurely.

"That was the madness of a moment," he declared. "It will not happen again."

"I wonder," she speculated.

"You need not. I am no woman worshipper, but I know how to tabulate them. You suit me as a secretary. You don't fit elsewhere. That's the end of that! Olga Kansky leaves for Nice to-morrow. Tell me about the Prime Minister."

Their conversation drifted away from the personal

note. As they lingered over their coffee, however, she brought it back.

"You are rather a fraud, you know," she said.

"How?" he asked suspiciously.

"You allot women their place in life — a very inferior place — and when you meet any one who deserves something better you pretend not to recognise the fact. You know very well that I was not made to be any one's plaything. Why am I not worthy to be a companion?"

He watched his glass filled with old brandy — held it out for a double portion — then he selected the strongest cigar he could find. Before lighting it he leaned across the table.

"I find you companionable," he admitted. "I treat you as a companion. If I needed a plaything, I should look elsewhere."

"In plain words," she observed, "when you seek recreation you walk in the garden where only exotics grow, like Olga Kansky."

"I hate allegories," he growled. "In plain words, I intend neither to marry nor to give any woman that place in my life which might be the equivalent of marriage."

Catherine was looking out of the window. The train from Paris had just arrived. The busses were beginning to rumble up the hill. A young man passed, seated in a little carriage. Catherine smiled. She had recognised Prince Frederick.

"My fate," she murmured, motioning downwards. "I really believe he has followed me back again. I adore perseverance and, after all, I suppose even a Kaiserin gets some fun out of life!"

The conclusion of luncheon brought a pleasant surprise to Catherine. At the end of the Arcade a power-

ful motor car was standing, into which Samara ushered her.

"You have seen nothing of this country," he said. "I have a fancy to take you to a spot of my own discovery."

"This makes me very happy," Catherine acknowledged, with a grateful smile. "Like every one else in my adopted country, I am a born tourist."

They turned a little towards Mentone, mounted to the clouds and paused for a moment at the summit of a parapeted road. Catherine looked downwards at the panorama below with amazed delight; Samara, with unassumed indifference.

"It is wonderful," he admitted, with a note almost of tolerance in his tone. "Here and there in wilder countries nature has distorted landscape into even more majestic outlines, but here comes the touch of humanity to interpose a strange element. It is man with his craving for luxury, not his desire for the beautiful, who has dotted these hills with villas, planted exotic gardens and brought his yachts through the storm into the harbour there. Marvellous, of course, beautiful in its way, but with the slur of paganism everywhere, the note of theatricality, from the gingerbread structure of the temple of men's greed to the lights and shadows which play beneath the clouds on the mountains behind. Perhaps you don't see it as I do. Why should you? Now I shall take you to the place I love."

"Sometimes I wonder," she said thoughtfully, as they went on their way, "whether I am not more of a pagan than you. You keep your real self so well hidden. Those gardens, for instance, to which you pointed a little scornfully. I worship their masses of colour and forget the twenty gardeners who toiled to produce the effect. And against that blue sea even the Casino it-

self appeals to me — perhaps to my sense of humour more than anything else, but it pleases me."

He looked at her with an unusually kind smile.

"There is the difference of a whole cycle of humanity between us," he reminded her, his voice growing a little sad as he proceeded. "You are younger even than your years — you have lived behind the high fences. I am older than mine, because life came to me in strong doses before I had time to make up my mind how to deal with it."

They descended to the sea level, passed through Nice with its amazing, flamboyant loveliness, through the old, mysterious, disreputable, picturesque town of Cagnes, and turned to the right along a narrower road which wound its way into the bosom of softer hills than those which towered down upon Monte Carlo. Here were vineyards, and many small homesteads, planted around with olive trees, each with their strip of meadow and arable land, and a sheltered corner in which grew a little clump of orange and sometimes lemon trees. The soil became redder, the grass greener. To Catherine it seemed that there was a gentler quality in the air, something more languorous than the keen atmosphere of the rockbound principality. Then the car drew up at a bend in the road a few kilometres above a quaint, tumble-down stone village. Samara alighted.

"Just a yard or two this way," he invited.

She followed him along a short cypress grove, scrambled up a knoll fragrant with the perfume of late mimosas, and uttered a little cry of delight. A short distance away was an old white stone house, half villa, half château, with close-drawn green shutters and a familiar tower at either end. It faced due south and one side was covered with wisteria and drooping magenta Buginvillara. Such garden as there had been had run

riot, but there was still a wealth of roses growing promiscuously with the olive trees and the mimosas right up to the edge of the vineyard which stretched towards the valley. Inland, a range of fertile hills with many small villages clustered in their clefts, rose to the skies, and beyond towered the pale outline of the snow-capped Italian Alps. A vista of meadowland and vineyard, of small homesteads and picturesque groups of farm buildings, stretched down to the old town of Cagnes itself, standing upon its pedestal of rock, unreal almost in the grey perfection of its rugged outline. And beyond, the great foreground of the Mediterranean, blue and placid. Something different from the ordinary light of admiration crept into Catherine's eyes as they wandered over the old house and lingered lovingly upon the tangled masses of flowers.

"I did not understand you a few minutes ago," she confessed. "I do now. I think that this is more beautiful than anything I have seen."

He smiled.

"I am not sure," he confided, "that there is not poison in this atmosphere. I came here by accident, with a fever of fighting in my blood, scheme after scheme forming in my brain — for Russia, for the world — and before I had been here half an hour I felt something of the spell of the lotus-eaters numbing my brain. I found myself speculating — wondering whether it was all worth while, how far one must travel through the toil of life before rest came. It was because this place spelt rest for me — spelt it differently, spelt it without ignominy, spelt it with beauty instead of sloth. Peace, after all, is the end of all of us."

She was more moved than she had believed possible.

"It seems so strange to hear you talk like that," she murmured. "You, Samara, the man of action, the

ruler of a nation, with a great fight looming up before you."

"Have I ever told you?" he asked — "I forget. I believe in God. This might be his compensation for failure."

She was too bewildered to speak, but curiously conscious of an utterly untranslatable emotion. He turned away after a farewell glance around.

"And so," he went on, as he led her back to the car, "I did perhaps the strangest thing I have ever done in life. I found this place for sale and I bought it. I signed the papers this morning. We walk down my own avenue, and I will give you," he concluded, stooping and picking a rose from a bush which had clambered halfway up an olive tree, "the first rose from my garden."

CHAPTER XXI

On the afternoon of the day fixed for their departure Samara was wandering aimlessly around and Catherine was screwing up her typewriter in the sitting room, when the floor waiter knocked at the door and announced a visitor. General von Hartsen, who had followed close behind the waiter, entered and bowed stiffly.

"Come to bid me a last farewell, General?" Samara asked.

"You will excuse me, sir, but my visit is not to you," was the unexpected reply. "Pending an official response to the queries which I have placed before your Government, I have nothing more to say."

"Not to me?" Samara repeated. "To what, then, do I owe the honour of this visit?"

"My visit is to Mademoiselle," the General announced.

Catherine looked up from her work a little unwillingly.

"To me?"

Von Hartsen bowed once more.

"If Mr. Samara permits," he continued, "I shall be glad of five minutes' conversation."

"What sublime effrontery!" Samara exclaimed. "Do you want to suborn my secretary before my face?"

"My visit is not political," the General confided, "but I confess that it would give me greater satisfaction to pursue it in your absence."

Samara was in an evil mood. The trivial business of preparing for departure had irritated him and he had other causes for self-dissatisfaction. He turned on his

heel and, without a word, marched through the connecting door into his bedroom.

"Mr. Samara is not in a very good temper," Von Hartsen observed. "He would perhaps be in a worse one if he knew the object of my visit."

"Won't you sit down?" Catherine invited.

The General shook his head. He moved, however, to the farther end of the room, and stood upon the hearthrug. One could almost hear the clank of his sabre as he walked. Without uniform he seemed somehow an unreal figure.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "I am an ambassador."

"The Prince?" Catherine asked calmly.

"Precisely."

Catherine continued her task of opening the drawers and collecting her oddments of stationery.

"You won't mind my doing this whilst you talk, will you?" she begged. "Our train leaves at three o'clock."

"It is part of the object of my visit," the General pointed out, "to persuade you not to take that train."

"But I must," she replied. "All our arrangements are made. We are going straight through to Moscow."

"I am in hopes that if you give a favourable hearing to my mission," the General persisted, "you will not go to Russia at all."

"A plot?" she enquired.

"Scarcely that," he protested. "On behalf of my ward, Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern, I have the honour to ask for your hand in marriage."

Catherine shut her despatch box with a click.

"You know all about me, then," she said coolly.

"Prince Frederick has confided in me," the General confessed. "I should like to point out to you that my young ward is making you this proposal entirely from reasons of sentiment. He is, if I may say so, very

greatly attracted. Since your first coming here, he, whom I have always found so docile, has been entirely unmanageable. It was the wish of his friends that he should marry Princess Freda of Bavaria. Up till now he has been acquiescent. Last night, extravagant though his language was, he convinced me that the scheme had better be abandoned."

"Is she anything like her pictures?" Catherine asked.

"The Princess is personable," was the somewhat brusque reply.

"She doesn't look it," Catherine declared. "I should have said that she was fat."

"It is to be admitted," the General acknowledged, "that she has not Your Highness' claims to good looks."

Catherine frowned angrily and glanced towards the door through which Samara had disappeared.

"Please do not address me in such a way again," she requested. "My name is Catherine Borans and I am a typist whom Mr. Samara has brought home from New York. I prefer for the present to remain as such. As for Prince Frederick's offer, I beg leave to decline it."

"To decline it?" the General exclaimed in amazement.

"Precisely. Life in Berlin as the wife of a banker would not amuse me."

The General looked quickly round the room as though to be sure that there was no possibility of their being overheard.

"Mademoiselle," he said, dropping his voice a little, "there are great things afoot in Europe. It is not Prince Frederick's destiny to remain for ever a banker of Berlin. There is no man in this world with such a future!"

Catherine shook her head doubtfully.

"I do not think that you will ever be able to restore the monarchy in Germany," she declared.

Von Hartsen smiled a smile of supreme confidence.

"Mademoiselle," he confided, "it is as good as done."

"You dazzle me," Catherine observed, with irony so faint that her visitor was unable to detect it. "Kaiserin of Germany! It is hard to refuse."

"It is impossible to refuse," the General persisted.

"Nevertheless ——"

He stopped her.

"Let me complete my mission," he begged. "For the first time Russia and Europe generally has been made aware of the existence of Prince Nicholas of Imanoff. That young man has never apparently visited his native country. He is unknown to the people — unregarded. Prince Frederick, on the other hand, has been brought up in his own country. He is a democrat, seemingly, and one of the most popular young men in Germany."

"You are trying to point out to me, I suppose," Catherine said, "that whereas Prince Frederick has every chance of becoming Kaiser of Germany, Prince Nicholas has no chance whatever of becoming Tzar of Russia."

"That is the truth," Von Hartsen insisted. "Prince Nicholas has no hold upon the affections of his people and except in the army there is no royalist following in Russia. The only chance Prince Nicholas would have would be if he remained friends with Frederick. Then, in the future, who could tell what might happen?"

Catherine smiled.

"Subtly put, General," she acknowledged, "but I am afraid that I can do no more than repeat my first answer."

"Mademoiselle!" he exclaimed.

"You see," Catherine continued, "notwithstanding the Russian blood in my veins, I was brought up and educated in America. I have earned my own living there. I have caught something of the spirit of the country. I should not dream for a moment of marrying any man for whom I had not affection. Prince Frederick has inspired me with no such sentiment."

The General looked at her steadfastly.

"It is strange," he muttered, "to hear one of your race speak in such a fashion."

"Times change, General," she reminded him. "To-day the pomp of life appeals less; the desire for decorous living appeals more. I am a Royalist by instinct and conviction, but I should never share even a throne with a man whom I did not love."

"This Nicholas," the General began ——

The typewriter and despatch box were there, but Miss Catherine Borans had vanished from the face of the earth. It was the Princess who corrected her visitor.

"General," she pronounced, "the interview is at an end. I hope that next time I meet Prince Frederick this matter will have been forgotten."

Samara came out from his room, wearing his travelling coat and carrying his hat.

"Still here, General?" he said. "You'll have to excuse us. The omnibus is waiting below."

A gleam of malice shone in the General's face. He realised Samara's ignorance.

"I thank you for your consideration, Mr. Samara," he said. "I need not detain either of you any longer. I am sorry to tell you that my errand was in vain."

"What errand?" Samara demanded.

"I am here on behalf of Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern," the General explained. "I was the bearer of

a proposal of marriage which I regret to say that Her Highness has declined."

"Her Highness?" Samara repeated. "What the devil do you mean?"

Von Hartsen's expression of surprise was excellently simulated.

"It is incredible," he exclaimed, "that you have not discovered the identity of this young lady! I have the honour, then, to present you to the Princess Catherine Helena Zygoff, Grand Duchess of Urulsk, Countess of Borans, and hereditary ruler of the lands of Utoff."

Samara stood perfectly still. His eyes were fixed upon Catherine's face. She smiled at him very pleasantly.

"Rather too bad of the General to give me away like this," she complained. "I hope you don't mind."

"One accepts the inevitable," he answered coldly.

"Her Highness has just refused the hand of Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern," the General continued. "It would be interesting to learn her future plans."

Catherine picked up her despatch box and laid her fingers lightly upon Samara's arm.

"My dear General," she said, "I must congratulate you on your acquaintance with my titles, which you have remembered more or less correctly, but I am also Miss Catherine Borans from the Weltmore Typewriting Bureau, temporary secretary to Mr. Samara. I think," she went on, looking up at her companion, "we ought to hurry, or we shall miss the train."

"You mean that you are coming with me?" Samara demanded.

"Coming?" she repeated. "Of course I am. We mustn't forget to send them up for the typewriter. Good-bye, General."

Von Hartsen gazed across at her fiercely.

" So you are a renegade," he muttered.

Once again he sank into insignificance at her parting glance.

" I have been brought up in a country," she replied, " where a girl learns to think and act for herself and men do not insult women!"

CHAPTER XXII

Nicholas, with his guide and counsellor, Boris Kirdorff, stood upon the balcony of an apartment on the third floor of Berlin's premier hotel and gazed downwards at the swaying crowds. In the distance a flag was flying from the roof of the Reichstag building. There was a general air of holiday-making. Nicholas, who was a little bored, yawned.

"Do you know," he asked, "why Von Hartsen was so anxious for us to stay over for the day?"

"I have an idea," his companion admitted. "I am not sure. That is his knock, however. He will probably explain."

He stepped back into the room and met the General who had just been ushered in. The three men stood together upon the balcony, the newcomer in the middle. The pavements below were crowded. Policemen of decidedly military appearance were riding back and forth. Occasionally a car passed down the middle of the guarded way, greeted now and then with a faint murmur of applause.

"You would like to understand, perhaps," Von Hartsen said, "why I have persuaded you to remain here till to-morrow morning's boat to Moscow. Well, I will tell you. I will tell you because there is something which I wish to point out to you which is in a sense an allegory to all of us. To-day, as you may know, is the opening of the Reichstag."

Kirdorff nodded.

"So much as that we know," he admitted. "To follow your politics, however, seems almost impossible. You appear to have seven parties struggling all against

the other, of whom the socialists, who were once the strongest, have become the weakest. How can you form a coherent government with such a muddle? "

Von Hartsen smiled.

" You ask a sage question," he said. " Many of the shrewdest men in Germany are asking the same. The parties will not coalesce. Only one unification is possible."

" And that? " Nicholas asked.

" Wait," was the prompt rejoinder. " Now listen. Here is the automobile of Herr Mayer, the leader of the socialist party, once the most popular man in Germany. See to-day how the people greet him."

The car rolled by, the man who was its solitary occupant — elderly, grey and worn — looking neither to the right nor to the left, seated with folded arms as one who faces an ordeal. Here and there was a faint murmur of applause; here and there distinct hisses. Of enthusiasm there was none at all.

" There passes a grave danger," Von Hartsen declared. " Twenty-five years ago, during the aftermath of the Great War, the socialists came rapidly to the front in the country. They reached the zenith of their power in nineteen-thirty. Since then their influence has steadily declined. To-day they are a forgotten force. Watch again. Here comes the automobile of the President. He is fairly popular. Is there a single real shout of welcome? Watch the people's faces. Who amongst them cares whether that man comes or goes? "

The car proceeded on its way. Many hats were lifted to its occupant, but, although there was all the time an undertone of applause, again there was no enthusiasm. These were the involuntary marks of respect paid by a law-abiding nation to its ruler. A dozen other cars passed by, containing deputies from

various political parties. Some were greeted in silence; some with a few courteous salutations; one or two with a little hum of interest. Then Von Hartsen leaned forward.

"The Prime Minister of Germany," he announced. "The leader of our Government. He rides to his doom — his political doom, that is to say."

Again hats were raised here and there, but a stony silence prevailed. Then came a new type of deputy — a general wearing his uniform, seated upright in his car, with his fingers resting as though by accident upon his sword.

"The Baron von Elderman!" Von Hartsen exclaimed. "Listen! Watch the people!"

A little forest of heads were uncovered and hats waved. This time there was a real hoarse murmur of applause. More than once the General saluted in response to the greetings.

"The Baron," Von Hartsen explained, "is Commander in Chief of the German armies. He is also deputy and leader of the monarchist party — so far as we permit it to be known that there is a monarchist party. Does it seem strange to you that republican Germany should find applause for him that it denies to all others?"

"Republican Germany is a misnomer," Kirdorff declared. "The soul of Germany has never been with the Republic."

"You speak well," was the other's solemn admission.

A few more cars passed, attracting varying degrees of notice. Then, from the distance came a volume of welcoming voices, swelling into a roar of enthusiasm. At last the people were moved. Down the middle of the avenue came a single open motor car, in which was seated a young man in uniform, alone.

"Frederick!" Nicholas exclaimed. "What does he do here?"

Von Hartsen smiled.

"He was elected a deputy only a few weeks ago," he explained. "He is coming to take his seat."

"But in uniform!" Nicholas muttered. "I thought that was prohibited."

"He is wearing only the uniform of a Cadet Corps," the General pointed out. "Strictly speaking, it is against the law. We risk it. Listen to the people! What do you think that means?"

The applause was almost deafening; coming nearer and nearer like an inbreaking wave. Kirdorff's pallid face had become set and rigid. There was a streak of colour in Nicholas' cheeks. The car passed like a flash below and went on its way. Every moment or so the young man inside raised his right hand to the salute.

"For you," Kirdorff declared, "it can mean but one thing. It means the return of the great days. If Berlin can speak like that, what of the rest of Prussia?"

Von Hartsen smiled as he turned away from the window.

"It is finished," he announced. "We shall find wine in the further room. It was to see what you have seen that I begged you to stay over. What is coming in Germany," he went on earnestly, "can come also in Russia. We are willing to help, but, like every one else in the world, we have our price. A glass of wine with you, gentlemen. Afterwards I myself must go to the Reichstag."

They passed into an inner room where refreshments were handed round. When the glasses were filled, Von Hartsen briefly dismissed the waiters.

"Listen," he began, as soon as they were alone, "I do not promise that I myself can do for you, Nicholas

Imanoff, what I have done for Frederick, but I can put you in the way of doing it for yourself. The seeds are already sown. To-day in your First and Second Armies there is an active monarchist propaganda going on hour by hour. Samara knows it well enough — hence his hurried return from America. It is not altruism alone which has influenced him in this great scheme of demilitarisation. It is because he knows that if ever the monarchy is restored to Russia it will be through the army. You have permission to return, Prince Nicholas? "

"Absolutely," the young man assented. "We all have — even Orenburg."

"It is a brave step of Samara's; I think a foolish one. Since you have the chance, however, show yourself openly everywhere. Ask Samara's permission to join the army. The whole machinery of propaganda is there. There is no reason why Russia should not revert to the only logical form of government within a year from to-day."

"You spoke of a price for your aid," Kirdorff reminded him.

"Naturally. Germany is suffering from peace. She needs war. We need your First and Second Armies before Samara can disband them."

Nicholas frowned.

"How can one of my race," he asked, "draw his sword against France? "

"It might happen," Von Hartsen replied, "that, if you were not prepared to do so, you might have no sword to draw. But consider — the France of to-day has nothing in common with the France who was once your great ally. She is avaricious to a degree. Ascend the throne, reëstablish imperial rule in Russia, and, before a month has passed, France will claim from you

countless milliards, the whole debt of your country to her. The alliance, now that Austria has passed away, has ceased to exist. Discard it! Germany and Russia are natural and inevitable allies. Make up your mind to it!"

A cannon sounded from somewhere in the neighbourhood. Von Hartsen finished his wine hastily.

"This is a great day for Germany," he concluded. "I must be there to see Prince Frederick take his seat. Deputy to-day; what he pleases by this time next year! Listen to me now and remember my words. The people will be ruled. No democrat has ever learned the art of kingship. Republics have made laws. They have never governed. It is the will of the people which is calling Frederick back to the throne of his ancestors."

He hurried off, leaving behind him a queer sense of excitement. Kirdorff's eyes were glittering. Nicholas seemed transformed.

"The will of the people!" he repeated ecstatically. "We, too, shall hear that call, Kirdorff! From Berlin to Odensk is not so far!"

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER I

CATHERINE paused for a moment in her task, listened, rose to her feet and moved towards the window. She was in a plain official-looking apartment, separated by a glass partition from many others upon the same floor. She might really have been working in the American office of some great mercantile undertaking. She was, as a matter of fact, on the top storey of a building in a Square of Moscow, given over to the Foreign Department of the Russian Government and entitled Government Buildings. It was exactly fourteen months since she had arrived in Moscow from Monte Carlo.

Down in the Square a great crowd of people had gathered and through them marched, still in fours but without any attempt at military discipline, a long line of men in ordinary civilian clothes. Here and there the spectators raised their hats; now and then came a wave of applause. As they passed the house at the corner of the Square, which was Samara's official residence, many of the marchers paused and looked upwards with something which was equivalent to a salute.

Andrew Kroupki, on his way to his office, saw Catherine standing by the window, hesitated for a moment, then entered and crossed the room towards her. He had recovered from his illness but he had still the air of an invalid; tall and thin, with sunken cheeks, a mass of black hair — a typical visionary. She greeted him with a little nod.

"What does it mean, Andrew?" she asked.

Before he could reply, Bromley Pride had joined them, his keen, clean-shaven face alight with interest,

restless as ever, swinging his tortoise-shell spectacles in his hand, apologising for his cigar and pointing out of the window in the same moment.

"Pride knows more about it all than I do," Andrew declared. "At any rate he is more up to date. I have been in Warsaw for three weeks — three dreary weeks," he added, dropping his voice a little and glancing appealingly at Catherine.

"Is it really so long?" she observed indifferently. "Well, that accounts for my having got a little behind the times. I have had your work to do as well as my own."

"I know all about these fellows," Pride declared, moving closer to Catherine's side and pointing downwards. "They are the last of Russia's Third Army. Yesterday they came up from barracks, marched over to the other side of the city, left their uniforms, were provided with civilian clothes, and now they are on their way to their jobs, wherever they may be. The last of a million men, Miss Borans! A wonderful piece of administration!"

Catherine, standing between the two men, watched the crowds with interest. There was a brief silence whilst they listened to the tumult of mingled shouting and cheering.

"It's a fine view, this," Pride continued. "It works in with the stuff I am writing. Do you know, Miss Borans, they sent me over here to see whether Samara could put this thing through — and he's done it! There isn't a statesman in our country or in Europe either could have tackled the proposition. It isn't much more than a year since he issued the first notice and came over to New York to borrow the money, and since then he's just taken a million men from shiftless and unproductive idleness and got 'em all working like bees in a

hive. If that isn't a triumph I'd like to meet one. I'm going to shake hands with President Samara to-night and tell him what I think of it."

"Are you going to the banquet?" Catherine enquired.

"I should say so!" was the emphatic reply. "I wouldn't miss it for anything. I've heard most of our own great speakers and a good many of the Englishmen, but Samara has them beaten to a frazzle. I guess he'll tell us to-night a few things that all Europe's waiting to hear."

"And perhaps he will not," Andrew Kroupki observed drily. "My master tells the world too much. He lays the cards too easily upon the table. It is magnificent but sometimes it is not diplomacy."

"Please go, both of you," Catherine enjoined, turning reluctantly away from the window and moving towards her desk. "I have the French President's speech in the Chamber last night to translate for Mr. Samara and he wants it before this evening."

"Make me a copy," Pride begged. "I've only seen extracts and my French is ghastly."

"You journalists are much too lazy," she declared. "You'll get it all in English to-morrow."

"To-morrow's no good to me," Pride persisted. "Slip another carbon in your machine, Miss Borans. It won't take you any longer. I'll wait till you've finished and we'll have a little dinner."

Catherine shook her head.

"Impossible," she regretted. "You forget that I am now officially recognised as Andrew's assistant in the position of private secretary to Mr. Samara. I couldn't possibly be seen dining with an American journalist who is reputed to give pearl necklaces, motor cars or millions for news."

"Bunkum!" he scoffed. "You've got another date."

"That may be," Catherine sighed gently. "I am much sought after. I'll make you a copy of the speech, Mr. Pride, but you mustn't take it as a precedent. Andrew, please come in and see me before you go. I shall want you to take these notes to Mr. Samara."

Andrew made no direct reply beyond a little bow. The two men left the room together and paused for a moment in the main avenue of the floor. The journalist gazed around with an exclamation of admiration.

"This is certainly a live place!" he pronounced. "Might be a stock operator's paradise in Chicago. What's the kiosk at the far end with the open roof and the funnel?"

"Office to receive and decode private wireless," Andrew explained. "They are in direct communication with the Intelligence Department on the floor below."

Pride gripped his companion by the arm tightly.

"Look here, young man," he said, "I expect you're wise to what I want to know. I've got to get my cable off in half an hour. Those Englishmen aren't over here again for nothing. I want to give them an idea on the other side as to whether the President is going to speak about the Second Army to-night."

"You should have asked Miss Borans," Andrew replied. "She is preparing his notes."

"I might as well have asked the sphinx," the other retorted impatiently. "That's the worst of a woman. She doesn't think — she obeys. It can't matter a cent to any one whether I am in a position to say that the President is going to talk about it or that he isn't — but you can't get that young lady to understand."

"You've tried her then?"

Pride shrugged his shoulders.

"I did just mention it this afternoon," he admitted. "Nothing doing!"

"Nor with me," Andrew observed shortly. "The Chief!" he exclaimed, in an altered tone. "If he speaks to you, you can ask him for yourself."

The main door of the hall had been suddenly thrown open by Ivan Rortz, admitting Samara. Pride stood to attention respectfully, hoping for a salutation, but Samara passed every one with absolutely unseeing eyes. At the far end of the broad passage was a heavy oaken door. This, too, Ivan, hurrying by his master, opened and Samara disappeared into his private room. The American looked a little disconcerted.

"No luck!" he grumbled. "I'll have to wait until to-night. For the greatest democrat in the world," he went on ruefully, "Samara is a perfect wonder at keeping us all just where he wants us."

"The Chief does everything his own way and it is a good way," Andrew declared. "He would never be able to stir a yard if he allowed every one to speak to him whenever he chose. Any one from any country in the world may obtain an audience with him in due course, but no one may speak to him or even recognise him without permission. That is the only way he is able to move about amongst us without trouble or hindrance. You'll excuse me, Mr. Pride. I've some work which I must hurry on. I did not know that the Chief was expected here to-day."

There came a sudden flash in his eyes and he remained a moment where he was, looking through the glass partition into Catherine's office. He saw her answer the telephone, replace the instrument, pick up a notebook, and move towards the door. He watched her pass along the passage until she reached the door of the room which Samara had entered. Ivan who was

standing outside on guard, admitted her without question. All the time the American was studying his companion.

"Say, Mr. Kroupki," he observed, "I sometimes wonder whether you ever regret that month's illness of yours in New York."

It was a purposeful stroke, designed to bring about trouble of a certain sort. The young man's dark eyes were black pools of anger now, his lips quivered. Nevertheless he spoke in a subdued tone.

"It had to happen," he muttered. "It will not last."

Without farewell Andrew Kroupki swung abruptly round and disappeared into his office. Pride stood for a moment looking after him. Then he, too, turned away and opened a door, over which was printed in white letters:

SALON No. 11

For Accredited Representatives of the Foreign Press

"A tough job to get a pull here!" he soliloquised, throwing himself into a comfortable chair and lighting a cigar. "I've offered to immortalise Samara or marry the girl. There seems to be only Andrew left. What about Andrew, I wonder?"

Pride smoked steadily on, his eyes fixed upon the ceiling. He was face to face with the eternal problem of his profession. His own instinct had scented trouble and brought him to Moscow. He was perfectly convinced that there would be news enough and to spare before many months had passed, but news which was shared with rivals was to Bromley Pride no news at all. Catherine was hopeless, and Samara divulged only what he wished known. Complete failure was a condition, the possibility of which he never admitted. There was still

Andrew — Andrew, impervious to bribes, impeccable at heart, but plunged suddenly into a maelstrom of passion!

"Crazy about the girl and madly jealous of her at the same time," he reflected. "Something should come of the combination!"

CHAPTER II

Samara, that afternoon, was for some reason excited. He showed it in the manner peculiar to him; his cheeks were a little paler, his eyes seemed clearer and filled with sombre fire. He sat upright in his high-backed chair, his fingers drumming upon the table in front of him. He did not even light a cigarette, generally his first action when he called at Government Buildings after leaving the Duma. The box stood by his side unnoticed. All the time his fingers tapped the table and his eyes asked Catherine questions.

She had paused upon the threshold after Ivan had closed the door behind her. Then she advanced a little farther into the room. Finally she stood almost by his side, her hand resting upon the back of a chair.

"You sent for me," she reminded him.

"Yes," he answered. "Sit down."

She resented his tone, as she frequently did, but in his present mood, obedience from others seemed to become automatic and inevitable. She sat down and, after a moment or two spent in turning over the pages of her notebook, looked up enquiringly.

"Tell me about your people over here?" he demanded.

"My people!" she murmured.

"Yes," he went on impatiently. "The Grand Duchess Alexandrina Sophia of Kossas, your much-to-be-esteemed aunt, and Kirdorff the Moscovite, the self-elected champion of the young man who has left off selling bonds in New York, and General Orenburg, the patriarch, and those two others — the young man who

was trying to make an honest living selling automobiles, and his sister. They are all here, aren't they?"

"They are all here now," she admitted. "You yourself gave them permission to return. Nicholas came first and the others have followed him in relays."

"Where did they get the money from?"

"Count Sabaroff — I might, perhaps, call him Cyril, as he is my cousin — is doing exceedingly well selling Ford cars," she announced. "His sister has started a milliner's shop."

Samara laughed shortly — not altogether pleasantly.

"A touch of western democracy come to my capital," he observed. "And the others?"

"Well," she hesitated, "I am not quite sure that I feel free to discuss their financial position, even with you."

"Don't be foolish," he protested. "They have become citizens of my republic. I have the right to know all I choose about them — I and my ministers. There is curiosity in certain quarters as to their means of livelihood."

Catherine smiled at him. She was silent for a moment, thinking that she rather liked his appearance when he was inclined to be angry; his mouth, hard and dominant, his eyes, with all their kindness veiled, keen and insistent, his tone the tone of a ruler.

"I think I shall tell you," she decided. "It may put you in a better humour. They are being financed by Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington."

"What the devil do you mean?" he demanded.

"Well, it does sound rather extraordinary, doesn't it?" she continued. "Almost like the plot of a musical comedy. There was a wonderful Englishman who lived many years ago — Gilbert, his name was — who would certainly have jumped at the idea. Never-

theless it is true. Mrs. Bossington is one of those Western Americans, rapidly becoming extinct, to whom a title is as the hallmark of divinity. She advanced the money for every one to come back to Moscow and settle down here."

"On the chance, I suppose," he suggested swiftly, "that some day or other they might, under more beneficent legislation, regain their estates and be in a position to reward in courtly fashion their generous benefactor."

"Rather high-flown," Catherine remarked, with a smile, "but still I have no doubt that it is a very fair analysis of what is in the back of Mrs. Bossington's mind. So far as I am concerned, I am glad that Andrew Kroupki's illness gave me an opportunity of getting here without such aid. I strongly disapprove of the manner in which some of them — Nicholas Imanoff in particular — draw upon the Bossington exchequer."

Samara stretched out his hand, took a cigarette from the box and lit it. It was, for him, a good sign.

"Listen," he said. "I am one of those men who like to move down the highway of life alone, but I am always open to the advice of my counsellors, who speak to me freely whensoever they choose. Only this afternoon one of my ministers, just as I was leaving the Duma, called me into his room. He wished to consult me upon no less a matter than you."

"That meddlesome policeman, I am sure," Catherine sighed. "He dislikes me immensely. I had to take him over some reports for you only last week, and he seemed shocked to think that I should have been trusted to type them."

"General Trotsk is no fool," Samara pronounced. "He pointed out to me that having succeeded in crushing Communism, there was yet one other danger — less

a danger of to-day, I believe, than a danger in years to come — of which we must take account. There is no recognised imperialistic party at present but I've a shrewd idea that there's one in embryo. Trotsk goes farther than that. He believes that the party is already in existence, working chiefly in the great cities and amongst the army, and assisted by German agents. Incidentally he asked me frankly whether I thought I was wise in having for my trusted secretary a young woman who was in close association with the Imperial family of Russia."

"I think I do the work very well," she said. "Did you explain that you took me from the Weltmore Typewriting Agency?"

"I did. Trotsk suspects that there was a design in your being sent to me."

"Then Ivor Trotsk is wrong," Catherine declared firmly. "I was chosen entirely by accident and, to be quite candid, I at first refused to come. If you think," she went on, "that my family associations, of which you know more than any one, render me unfit to be your secretary, send me away. Andrew Kroupki would be very glad so far as the work is concerned."

"What do you mean by 'so far as the work is concerned'?" Samara demanded.

She deliberated for a moment.

"I begin to think," she confessed, "that notwithstanding your stony attitude towards me, I must be quite attractive to a number of male human beings. Andrew is very deeply in love with me. I foresee that I shall have great difficulty with him."

"Better tell him the truth about your identity," Samara advised drily. "That will cure him."

She shook her head.

"I am not at all sure that I wish him to be cured,"

she observed. "Every well-brought-up girl expects to have at least one man in love with her. Did you send for me, Mr. Samara, merely to tell me of Ivor Trotsk's suspicions, or is there any work I can do for you?"

"I wish to call upon your aunt," Samara announced. "My car is at the door. Show me the way, if you please, to where she is living."

Catherine was a little startled.

"My aunt will be honoured," she said. "Do I understand that you expect me to accompany you?"

"Yes," was the curt reply.

"Whilst I put my hat on," she suggested, "I wonder whether you would care to see Bromley Pride for a moment. He is aching for a word with you."

"He can come in for three minutes," Samara assented. "Do not keep me longer. Tell Ivan as you go out that he can be admitted."

Catherine left the room a little thoughtfully. She knocked at the glass panelling of the office where Pride was sitting. He came out at once, his cigar in his hand.

"I've earned that pearl necklace or whatever it was you hinted at," she told him. "The Chief will see you for exactly three minutes. Don't keep him any longer. We're going out motoring together."

Pride laid down his cigar and moved eagerly away.

"Say, I'm awfully obliged, Miss Borans," he declared. "See you later."

He hurried off to the audience chamber. Catherine moved towards the telephone.

"What do you want, Pride?" Samara asked, as the journalist entered. "Sit down, unless you can talk quicker standing. You can stay for exactly three minutes."

"Standing, please," was the prompt reply. "I've

been looking into the streets. I saw the last of a million soldiers go their way. What about the others?"

"Read the report of the Peace Conference, Wednesday week," Samara suggested. "I am going to London to attend it."

"I want to know beforehand," the journalist rejoined eagerly. "My paper likes definite forecasts. I see those two Englishmen are over here again — Lord Edward Fields and Edgar Hammond. It's their third visit. I guess there's something doing this time. Can't you put me wise, Samara, just a few hours before the others? We want to be in the know — not to make absolute statements, but to prophesy — and then be right."

"Excellent from the point of view of your paper," Samara observed drily. "It doesn't happen to suit me. I can tell you nothing."

"Not a hint?" Pride persisted.

"Not a hint. Understand from me now, please, that I have come to the conclusion that it would not be to the interests of the Russian Republic for word of our projected plans to become public property until I give the signal. That's final!"

Pride sighed.

"Nothing else for me?" he asked a little wistfully.

"My God, man, what do you want!" Samara demanded. "Here you are, most favoured of all correspondents in the world. You have seen to-day the passing of that first million. Can't you write about that? Isn't that dramatic enough for you? A million fire-eating monsters dissolved into thin air; a million sturdy, self-respecting Russian peasants bending over their toil, earning food and dwelling and clothes and savings for their womenkind and children! Feet on the earth, head to the skies — men, not puppets any longer!

Go and write about it. Finished! Please tell Miss Borans to wait in her office until I fetch her."

Samara waved his visitor away. He never shook hands; seldom indulged in the ordinary amenities which passed between men. He spoke for a moment on the telephone, frowned and laid down the instrument. Then he took up his hat and gloves, left his office and, followed by Ivan, walked rapidly down the broad central passage. Catherine was waiting for him on the threshold of her own apartment. He motioned her to step back, entered and closed the door behind him.

"To whom have you been telephoning?" he demanded.

She looked at him for a moment with immovable face. Then she smiled faintly.

"To my aunt," she replied.

"Why?"

"To tell her to be sure and see that there were hot cakes for tea," she confided.

"You think that I believe that?" he exclaimed.

"Why not? It happens to be the truth," she assured him.

Samara's manner to older women possessed a charm of which he seldom, in his general intercourse with the other sex, gave any indication. His bow to the Grand Duchess was the bow of a courtier; his few words of welcome were admirably spoken. For the first ten minutes no serious subject was mooted. It was Alexandrina herself who introduced another note. She was suddenly deeply and intensely in earnest.

"Mr. Samara," she said, "I should like you to know that in making possible this return to my own country, you have given an elderly woman the greatest happiness life could offer. I recognise the generosity of it. I

wish to pay my tribute to it. It is not an easy thing for me to say to you, but I do say it — I thank you."

Samara bowed gravely.

"Duchess," he pronounced, "it is one of the theories of my life that every man and every woman, too, lives more naturally and to the best account in their native land."

He paused for a moment, but was obviously about to continue, when Colonel Kirdorff was announced, and immediately afterwards General Orenburg. They both welcomed Samara respectfully but perhaps with some measure of constraint. A few minutes later the latter rose to take his leave.

"My visit," he explained, turning a little towards the newcomers, "was intended to be one of courtesy to Her Highness. Since I have been fortunate enough to find you, Colonel Kirdorff, and you, General Orenburg, here together, let me make this further use of it. I want to say that I am happy to welcome you back to Russia, and I am glad if I have been able to make your coming possible. So long as you all pursue the lives of Russian citizens — you, General, and you, Colonel, in the army, and Your Highness as a Russian lady of society — you will, I am sure, find no one venture to interfere with you. But I rule, not for myself, but for my people, and I tell you frankly that my espionage system is good. If I wished, I could not exclude you from its activities. I desire, therefore, to give you this warning. If by any chance any one of you should be discovered plotting against the State, the fact that I brought you here would count for nothing. If you enter into any conspiracy of any sort you will be discovered and no representations to me would be of the slightest avail. I did not put you on your parole when I asked you back. I did not do so purposely. I ask you even now for no

promises. Live as you think well and shape your futures as you choose, but even though mine has the name of being a humane Government, it has no mercy upon those who plot against it."

There was a moment's silence. No one seemed anxious to reply. Samara, looking round at their expressionless faces, found his mind wandering off to trifles. He realised that the room was small and overheated and the atmosphere heavy with the perfume of musk. Alexandrina was wearing an unbecoming gown but some wonderful old jewellery. The two men had changed since the New York days. Kirdorff stood differently upon his feet, looked differently out of his eyes. The General seemed years younger. As Samara watched them, he was conscious that there was a mutual and silent understanding between them all from which he was excluded. He glanced swiftly at Catherine. She, too, was in it. She was of them — belonged to them. He was a fool to hope even for her fidelity! In the end it was Alexandrina who spoke. There was a slight stiffness in her manner.

"One might conspire in New York," she remarked ——

"In the salon of Mrs. Bossington, perhaps," he scoffed. "Your conspiracies there would very surely end in dreams, but to-day — listen — there is a line which reaches even from this room, Madame la Duchesse, to the Headquarters of the Second Army at Odensk. I think if I were you I would snap the line."

Again there was a tense silence in the little room. The two men stood like graven images. Alexandrina had picked up a paper fan and was wielding it mechanically. Even Catherine seemed for a moment to have lost her *savoir faire*. With a curt little gesture of farewell, Samara took his leave.

CHAPTER III

Bromley Pride and Andrew Kroupki dined together that evening in the Savoy Grill Room — not the Savoy of the Strand, but the Savoy of a certain street leading off one of the newly developed boulevards in Moscow. It was a meal which distinctly lacked all the characteristics of a festival. No two personalities in all the city could have been so ill-attuned. Andrew was neurotic, almost neurasthenic; distracted at the same time by his passion for Catherine and his insane jealousy of her. Bromley Pride, full of vigorous common sense, sane, healthy and indefatigable in his profession, saw life as a confirmed materialist, desired only the possible things, and had scant sympathy with the emotional wear and tear to which his companion continually subjected himself. Nevertheless they ate and drank together and made conversation up to a certain point like any other two men brought together in the daily affairs of life.

"One of the by-laws for which I suppose your President is responsible," Pride remarked, tapping the menu which was printed in Russian.

Andrew glanced at it and nodded.

"A reasonable edict," he declared. "Any one who chooses may print his wine list or menu in French, but it must also be printed in Russian. Why not? We are in Moscow. We like French food, we like French wines, but we want to take them as Russians, not as French people. A nation may be adaptive and appreciative, but must not be coalescent."

"I guess you're right," Pride admitted. "Russia's a well-governed country to-day — a country with a definite identity. During the last ten years you have

broken loose from the greatest danger any nation ever experienced. You have shaken off German thraldom and German influence."

"Without warfare too," Andrew added eagerly. "By just, discriminating legislation. The man who makes money in Russia, out of Russian industries or Russian mineral wealth, must spend his money here or face a different scale of taxation. We have had enough of foreigners tapping our supplies of wealth, drawing off the profits and flitting to some other country."

"Does it ever occur to you," Pride remarked, "that you are gradually making an enemy of Germany?"

"Better that," his companion retorted hotly, "than to be her tame monkey, ready to pull the chestnuts out of the fire when she gave the word. That is what we were under the Communists. Five years more of their government and the Germans would have marched our armies from Russia to the French frontier and not a soul could have stopped them."

"And now," Pride observed, "it seems that you will very soon have no armies to march anywhere."

"Why should we need armies?" Andrew demanded. "Invasion of our country is no longer to be feared. The Peace Conference has tied most of the nations of the world hand and foot. Germany, through her own cunning, remains outside, but what would it profit her to cross our frontiers? Where would she strike, at what, and with what object? The frontiers of France have been a brazen defiance to Germany for fifty years. All her coal fields, her manufacturing towns, her wine-growing districts, are there, like Naboth's vineyard — a stone's throw across the frontier for jealous eyes to gaze upon. We have nothing like that to offer the invader. A military establishment for us is a farce."

"I heard Samara speak at Geneva," Pride remarked drily.

His companion was unmoved.

"I plagiarize, I know," he admitted. "Why not? Who can repeat the words of a greater man?"

The restaurant was crowded; noisy with a babel of talk, blue-hung with cigarette smoke. In the distance a small orchestra was drowned by the volume of conversation. Most of the people were Russian; here and there a few Germans, an occasional Englishman, a few Americans. Newcomers were still arriving. Pride was immensely interested in the passing of two very distinguished-looking young people — a short, dark young man and a young woman, a little taller, dressed in black, with a black picture hat and ermine wrap, a very graceful carriage, blue eyes with a roving tendency, and beautifully marked eyebrows.

"Amazing!" the journalist murmured. "I knew that young man in New York — he was trying to sell Ford motor cars. And the girl — why, she was in a Fifth Avenue milliner's! What on earth has brought them to Moscow?"

Andrew smiled.

"They are part of the great comedy," he declared. "They own names as long as this menu. They are aristocrats of the Russia which has passed away. Yet you are quite right. The young man learnt the automobile trade in New York and the girl, as you say, was a milliner's assistant. One must live! — even the children of those who escaped from Russia with nothing but their lives."

"What I can't catch on to," Pride confessed, "is what has brought them back to Russia? How do they live?"

"They are back here at Samara's express invitation,"

Andrew explained. "A whole nest of Monarchists! The President has revoked all edicts of banishment except against anarchists. He maintains that every Russian is entitled to live in his own country and air his own opinions."

"I guess he's right," the other acknowledged. "They'll do no harm and there are not madmen enough left in the world to preach Tzardom here."

Andrew Kroupki shrugged his shoulders. He drained half the contents of his glass before he answered.

"How can one reckon on anything?" he demanded. "Two generations of education have scarcely altered the Russian peasant. He is still the same simple, faithful human being; seeking for something in the world or heaven to lean against — a Tzar or a God or anything he can believe in. He isn't dangerous like the German mob because you can't appeal to his intellect. You can appeal only to his instinct and I am not so sure as I should like to be that his instinct for Tzardom is dead. There are many people, even members of the Cabinet, who think that Samara is doing a rash thing in interfering with the armies."

"Precisely why?" Pride asked.

"For fear he should disturb some smouldering bonfires of royalist sentiment," Andrew answered, enlighteningly.

Pride was inclined to be disputatious.

"A cause," he declared, "needs sinews; money, brains, enthusiasm. Who is there in the world who possesses these things likely to devote them to the overthrow of such a man as Samara or to placing the country once more under its old yoke? There's no real danger."

Andrew threw some money on the table and rose abruptly.

"Let us go to the Club, or a music hall, or some-

where," he proposed. "The atmosphere of this place is stifling."

They left the restaurant and passed along the broad thoroughfare thronged with human beings, hung with sky signs, a marvel of pulsating life. It was a warm evening and the open-air cafés were crowded. From the wide-flung doors, as the two men sauntered along, they heard the sound of music, occasionally the sharp pattering feet of the professional dancers. Music halls and cinemas invited their patronage. In the more dignified streets through which they presently made their way, most of the larger theatres were situated, every one of which seemed able to display the warning notice — "House Full." Pride paused at the corner and looked back. A new sky sign, which was one of the wonders of the world, was flashing hieroglyphics upon the clouds.

"I have just finished reading a book on Moscow during the third year of the Communist rule," he confided. "What a transformation! Your Samara is a great man, Andrew Kroupki!"

"He is one of the world's greatest rulers," was the reverent reply. "No one else could have drained the poison out of the country as he has done and then filled her with new and vigorous life."

They stopped in front of the façade of a theatre. Automobiles were still setting down late arrivals. Pride glanced at the playbill.

"A French comedy," he remarked, "of the type of Edmond About. They sent me a box this morning. Shall we see it?"

Andrew Kroupki had been seeking for an excuse to break away from his companion, but before he could find one, Pride had led the way in. A young man dressed with such precision as to amount almost to

foppishness was finishing a cigarette in the vestibule. He touched Andrew on the arm as he passed.

"I am forgotten, then?" he asked. "We were at college together, Andrew Kroupki. We attended the same lectures afterwards."

"Ivor Molsky!" the latter exclaimed. "I remember you quite well. But I heard ——"

He stopped short. The young man smiled. He was rather a saturnine-looking person with an uncertain gleam in his eyes, and a restlessness of manner at variance with his immaculate appearance.

"Well, well," he interrupted, "never mind what you heard. I am not so bad, Andrew. I have often thought about you and our talks. You serve a great master."

"None greater on earth," was the fervent response.

His friend smiled with an air of tolerance.

"Gabriel Samara is a genius," he acknowledged, "but he is like the others. He is bound hand and foot, and the handkerchief is across his eyes. He has the will to go forward but the way into the light has not been shown him."

An attendant broke in upon their conversation and ushered Andrew and his companion to a small box in the second tier, next to the one presently occupied by Molsky. The theatre was unusually full and the performance was just beginning. Andrew drew his chair behind the curtains and sat a little gloomily in the background. Pride, on the other hand, leaned over the ledge and surveyed the house with interest. Nearly every one was in evening dress. It was an audience distinguished not only for its apparent opulence but for other and more pleasing qualities. Men and women were the study of Pride's life. He realised without effort to what class of the community these people belonged.

"My God!" he exclaimed, in an undertone to Andrew. "Your Russia is incredible! Marvellous! All over the world, even in Spain, to-day, the money seems to have got into the wrong hands. You find the wrong people spending it. This is the only country which seems to be holding the balance and to be holding it without a court or aristocracy. These women with their pearls, and these men in their very correct evening clothes, they are not of the *bourgeoisie* as we used to understand the word. They are intellectuals."

Andrew showed a momentary flicker of interest.

"It is the Chief," he said. "Our tabulated taxes are a model for the world. Inherited wealth is taxed first, commercial next, brains last of all. That accounts for what you see. Even in England forty years ago they made ghastly blunders — taxed the brain worker and the artist equally with the war profiteer. Nothing of that here. Hence this audience of which you approve."

The play proceeded; clever and well received. During the interval Andrew touched his companion on the arm.

"My prince of journalists," he murmured, a little satirically, "you have studied this audience so carefully and yet you have failed to notice the most interesting people here — the most interesting to you at any rate, with your journalistic instinct."

"I confess it," Pride acknowledged. "I don't recognise a soul."

"In the box exactly opposite," his companion pointed out, — "the man with the grey moustache and the clean-shaven man. It is — don't you recognise them? You must — one is Lord Edward Fields and the other is Edgar Hammond, the man who they say will be the next British Chancellor of the Exchequer. They are members of the English Commission over to settle finally

the terms of this second British loan — if it comes off."

Pride scrutinised the two men closely through the opera glasses, which he procured from an attendant. He sighed as he laid them down.

"If they had belonged to any other nationality in the world," he said, "I'd have gone across and trusted to my luck to get a word with them. A Britisher on official business I simply daren't face. Have they seen Samara yet?"

"Only unofficially," Andrew replied. "They meet the Cabinet to-morrow, and the Council in the afternoon."

"The Council is 'Samara,'" Pride remarked drily.

"And why not?" was the prompt retort. "There is no brain in the world like Samara's; no ruler like him. What does he want with a dozen inferiors, putting in their spoke? The best thing you can say of the Russian Cabinet is that it recognises a pedagogue."

The curtain went up once more and the play was resumed to the interest and amusement of its audience, all unconscious of the drama to come. It was towards the end of the second act, in the middle of a tense scene between the principal actor and actress that the amazing thing happened. From the very next box to that occupied by Pride and his companion, a man suddenly leaned out. His knee seemed to be upon the ledge of the box, his arm thrown back almost, as Pride said afterwards, with the action of an American baseball pitcher. His shrill cry rang through the house.

"To hell with the foreign capitalists!"

Something black, about the size of an orange, travelled in an arc across the auditorium. The two men watched it with fascinated eyes. It seemed to them that the Englishmen had plenty of time to spring from

their places. They remained seated, however, utterly unconscious of their peril. A shout rang through the building.

"A bomb! Beware!"

The missile appeared to pass a little above the box at which it was aimed. As it struck the wainscotting there was a flash which seemed to shoot from the floor to the ceiling of the theatre, a roar and trembling of the earth, the hiss of splintering wood, the dull crash of chairs and woodwork scattered in every direction. Pride sprang to his feet. Both men realised at the same moment that the bomb had been thrown from the next box. They dashed out. The box itself was empty but, coming towards them, evidently headed in his flight, was Molsky, the man who had been its occupant and their neighbour.

The change in his appearance was astonishing. The sallowness of his face had turned to a distinct shade of yellow, his abundant black hair was no longer smooth, but seemed to have been caught by a tornado, his cynical lips had parted; nothing remained of the almost meticulous precision of his toilet. As he came towards them, running with long, uneven footsteps, they could catch the glint of his yellow teeth, almost like fangs, the wild, destroying lust of his expression, filled, too, with a certain joy of the turmoil and roar of his work of destruction. On their right was an open window from which there was only a short drop on to the leads. It was obvious that he was making for it. Pride stood directly in his way. The man screamed something, lowered his head a little but too late. The American in his younger days had played halfback at Harvard. He was not a man to be passed. The fugitive seemed to realise the fact. He steadied himself.

"Let me go!" he shrieked. "This is not for you."

Then he met the impact of Pride's fist and went down like a log. In a moment they were all upon him — attendants, police, and even members of the audience. It was simply a heap of passionate, furious humanity, with little to be seen of the man underneath but a thin stream of blood across the corridor. In the box opposite one Englishman lay dead and another apparently dying.

"It is a pity," Andrew Kroupki confessed, as the two men left the theatre half an hour later. "An event like this is nothing more nor less than a hideous anachronism. It will put us back amongst the nations a score of years."

"I shouldn't say that," Pride remonstrated. "The man was a fanatic. They exist in every community."

The younger man shook his head faintly.

"We were students together," he declared, "and afterwards Molsky became a professor at our premier university. No one could ever fathom what his political principles were. He hated all forms of what he called 'unauthorised rule' and he wrote some very clever criticisms of Samara and his attitude towards Communism. Yet the Chief would never have him touched. He called him his most intelligent critic — read everything he wrote, would have argued with him if he could."

"A man of education," Pride murmured. "It seems incredible!"

"There is no man in the world," Andrew Kroupki pronounced deliberately, "so brilliant in his way, so well-read and so amazingly subtle as the modern anarchist. He derived his first nourishment from the brutalism of Lenin and Trotsky, was suckled on Marx, and completed his education — God knows where!"

"What will be his end?"

"Simple enough," was the somewhat terrible reply. "The Chief has an enactment that any man found even handling a bomb is hung after a drum-head trial. If there is anything left of Molsky, he will be hung before eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER IV

Andrew Kroupki's words were in a sense prophetic. Molsky was hung at dawn on the following morning, and a few days later a hundred thousand Russians watched with bared heads the passing of the English statesman's funeral. Edgar Hammond was in hospital and some hopes of his recovery had been held out. The echoes of Samara's passionate denunciation, both of the crime and of the hideous code of thought from which it sprang, had reverberated not only through the country but through Europe. The simple end of his peroration was always remembered:

"If you wish to kill senselessly," he cried, "kill me. I walk the streets of Moscow day by day unprotected and unarmed. I stand for the things of which the man you have slain was only one link in the chain — I stand for the things themselves. Kill me and do not shame the oldest of the Russian virtues — hospitality!"

That night Samara walked unattended, save by Ivan, from the Duma to Government Buildings, and from Government Buildings to the presidential abode at the corner of the Square. If any would-be avenger of Molsky's shameful death had sought for his opportunity it was certainly freely offered to him. Samara, however, was unmolested. Nevertheless Ivan groaned as the postern gate leading into the courtyard of his master's home swung to after them. They had walked in leisurely fashion but the sweat stood out in dark beads upon his forehead.

"It was folly, that, Master!" he exclaimed. "On an ordinary day, yes, but to-day, with Molsky's body

still dangling from the gibbet there might be madmen abroad."

Samara paused to light one of his cigarettes.

"I expected it, Ivan," he acknowledged simply. "Yet what can one do? When strangers are slain by our people one must face what may come. Bring me a brandy and mineral water into the library. I am beginning to be a coward."

His old housekeeper, imported from the south of Russia, a quaint survival of mediævalism, in her black woollen gown, strange headdress and dialectic speech, met him in the hall.

"There is a woman, Master, who waits for you," she announced.

Samara's language, for a moment, though incomprehensible, was violent. The woman listened without change of countenance.

"This woman would not be denied," she continued. "The Master will understand when he sees her. I tried to send her away but it was not possible."

Samara handed his coat and hat to Ivan and walked with slow footsteps across the marble hallway into the great library which was his official audience chamber. As he recognised the woman who rose to meet him he gave a little exclamation of surprise. There were others who might have been there; he had never dreamed of this visit from Catherine.

"I was at the Duma," she announced brusquely. "I heard your speech. There was something which I felt I must say to you."

"Pray be seated," he begged. "This is the first time you have honoured my humble abode. You must drink from my samovar and smoke one of my cigarettes."

She was still in her working clothes; a little tired, apparently a little dispirited. She accepted the easy-

chair he wheeled up for her, drank her tea and lit a cigarette.

"I should not be here without orders, of course," she admitted, a little abruptly. "It's a terrible breach of etiquette, I know, but sometimes I have no chance of speaking to you for days together, and they tell me that you are going to London."

"London!" he repeated bitterly. "London will probably have nothing to do with me after last night. They will say what is the good of trying to help a country who cannot deal with her own madmen?"

"England is not like that," she answered gently. "She certainly is not to be intimidated. They will grant the loan."

"What brought you here?" he demanded. "You must have had a reason for coming. You must have had something definite to say."

"Naturally," she assented. "I had a definite object in coming to you. I wish to give up my work."

"To leave me?"

"Yes."

There was a brief silence — a silence not of indifference, but tense in its way, and pregnant with much hidden emotion. These two might almost have been duellists pausing to measure each other's strength — Samara, grim, almost forbidding-looking, with the drawing together of his heavy eyebrows, an effective figure in his great oak chair, with a background of dimly seen tapestried walls; Catherine, more beautiful than ever in her absolute listlessness. Her skin was clear, bordering upon fragility. Her eyes were large and soft, even if a little weary. The simplicity of her gown detracted nothing from the charm of her lithe figure. There was a certain abandon in her attitude of fatigue, full of attraction from its almost animal-like naturalness. She

sat in a gentle pool of shaded light, a subdued glimmer which brought out the flecks of gold in her hair, slightly disarranged after her long day's work. Into her expression, as she met his steadfast gaze, there crept something of the light of battle.

"It was to be expected," he admitted slowly. "Your interests lie elsewhere. You wish to leave at once?"

"I draw my pay weekly," she said. "You are entitled to a week's notice. Accept it, if you please."

"That is done," he assented.

"I will now tell you," she went on, "why I choose to go. You have apparently lost your faith in me. You have conceived suspicions of my friends. It is possible that these are justified. I am only partially in their confidence."

She paused. He watched her steadily.

"Finish," he insisted. "There is more, I suppose."

"To-morrow," she continued, "you have ordered Andrew to come here for the day and send his machine. He is a bad typist, a worse stenographer and he hates all form of dictation. His work has lain along different lines."

"Proceed, please," Samara invited.

"Andrew's duties," she pointed out, "have always been to act as your representative at committee meetings of the Duma. He is a sort of go-between with you and your ministers. He is the one person who enjoys your complete confidence. I do not complain, but when I came with you from New York it was as your confidential secretary. I have become your typist. Now that there is important work to be done even that is taken from me. I resign."

"You will throw in your lot with your family?" he asked with a sneer. "You will exist on the bounty of Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington?"

Her eyes flashed angrily.

"That is ungenerous," she exclaimed. "I consider the position of my aunt and some of her entourage as undignified in the extreme. It is ungenerous of you, however, to remind me of it."

"Perhaps so," he admitted. "As a matter of fact, I am angry. I do not wish to lose you."

"You are very gracious," she murmured.

Ivan entered, after ponderous knocking and asked his master a question. Samara nodded.

"I dine here," he declared. "Have dinner served for two, in an hour's time."

"For two?" she repeated questioningly.

"You will dine with me," he said curtly. "It shall be either our farewell or — a celebration."

"A celebration of what?"

"Of a better understanding," he answered, with a faint softening of those lines at the corners of his mouth.

She lazily removed her hat and smoothed out her hair.

"I shall dine with you as I am," she announced. "I am untidy and my head aches. This mechanical work depresses and fatigues me. I should like to go home and put on a pretty frock, but I have not the energy."

He seemed suddenly changed; infinitely more human, responsive to her altered attitude.

"As you sit there — or should I say, recline? — it seems to me that no change in your appearance could be for the better," he assured her.

She glanced at him in half-pleased surprise.

"A compliment!" she exclaimed.

He shook his head.

"A compliment implies a certain deviation from the truth," he observed. "I meant what I said. Now I

will deal with your complaint and offer you an explanation. I have an important document to draw up to-morrow. I was proposing to take only Andrew into my confidence for one reason, and one reason only. Trotsk and some others suspect you of imperialistic sympathies. I, alone, know the truth about you. You are day by day subject to the influence and persuasions of your family. I do not consider it fair upon you yourself that you should be in possession of information which they would give their souls to acquire, especially ——"

She took advantage of his pause.

"It is for what comes after that 'especially' that I wait," she told him.

"Especially," he concluded, "as you have not yet declared yourself as between me and Nicholas Imanoff."

"I realise your problem," she admitted. "I am glad that you have been frank about it."

"Perhaps you have a pronouncement to make," he suggested.

"I wish I had," she replied. "I can at least be truthful. All my life I have prayed for the return of Tzardom to this country. That I suppose is in my blood. I have looked upon you with respect because you delivered Russia from the yoke of the Bolshevists, because you have evolved at least a sane form of republicanism, but I have looked upon you at the same time as a stumblingblock in our way."

"Your candour," he declared, "is most attractive. Pray continue."

"I am trying to let you into the back of my mind," she went on thoughtfully. "I am a daughter of Tzardom and a belief in monarchical government is in my blood, but I am also a daughter of Russia. Every spare minute since I returned here I have devoted to

studying your system of government, seeking justification for it. I am not clever; I often wish I were. I have not even a knowledge of history to guide me. Of one thing, however, I am still convinced, — that there is exceedingly little difference between a beneficent Tzardom and the Government of to-day."

"Absurd!" he scoffed. "The present Government of Russia is the most democratic in the world."

"And the most autocratic," she retorted coolly. "It is you who rule Russia."

"By the mandate of the people," he reminded her.

"Nothing of the sort," she objected. "The people elected a republican government. You travelled the country for a year. You hypnotised them. They voted according to your decree. What has your Cabinet or even your Inner Council to do with the Government of Russia? Nothing! You are an autocrat more supreme than any Tzar who ever lived."

"I make no comment on what you say. Whither does it lead?"

"To this," she replied. "If Russia is to be ruled by one man, why not a Tzar? The Royalists have learnt their lesson. An Imanoff has more right upon the throne than you."

"Nicholas Imanoff," he jeered. "You would put him in my place!"

She was a little disconcerted, but she did her best to conceal the fact.

"Nicholas would never assume such powers as you have done," she replied. "He would govern through his ministers. If you remained a patriotic Russian you would probably be one of them."

"I am cheaper than a Tzar," he pointed out. "I do not cost the State even a modest million a year, nor do I ——"

He broke off in his speech. His housekeeper was standing upon the threshold, gazing expectantly towards Catherine.

"My housekeeper will show you where to rearrange your hair, if you really think that it needs it," he said courteously. "With your permission, I will not change my clothes. Shall we meet here in twenty minutes? You shall tell me then whether I can qualify as a bartender when the Royalists have driven me out of Russia!"

She made a little grimace over her shoulder as she left the room; a quaintly human touch which seemed to lessen at once the strain of their relations. He stood with his fingers upon the bell, listening to her departing footsteps.

The simplicity of Samara's life was typified in the dinner which was presently served. The house itself was an old palace of the Grand Duke Nicholas, sacked by the Bolshevists in nineteen-seventeen, occupied by Lenin for some time during his stay in Moscow, and finally transformed into the official dwelling house of the Chairman of the Council, sometimes called President of the Russian Republic. Little remained of its former splendour, except its architectural proportions and the tapestry-covered walls of the room in which they sat. Dinner was served at one end of a long mahogany table, the greater part of which remained uncovered. The only illumination in the room was that afforded by wax candles. Ivan waited behind his master's chair, and a single manservant was the other attendant. The dinner itself was plain but excellent; the champagne exceptional in age and quality.

"I am free to confess that I am no longer tired," Catherine observed, as she sipped her wine. "It is wonderful that you should have been alone. One fancies you always doing something official at night."

"There was a banquet to the Englishmen," he told her. "That had to be cancelled, of course."

He turned and gave Ivan a few rapid orders. The cloth disappeared as though by magic. Coffee, fruit and liqueurs alone were left upon the table. Even Ivan presently withdrew. Catherine was conscious of a little thrill — she scarcely knew whether of excitement or apprehension — when she realised, not only that they were alone, but that they were alone with certain things yet to be said.

"So you want to leave me, Catherine Borans," he remarked.

He had pushed his chair around and crossed his legs, so that they were almost side by side. The chairs themselves were relics of ancient magnificence, with huge black oak backs and upholstered in worn rose-coloured damask. Looking at him as he bent forward to light his cigarette Catherine felt herself compelled to half-reluctant admiration. The wine which he had drunk freely had brought little more than a faint flush of colour to his cheeks; his eyes were bright and full of clean fire; his mouth, as usual, incomprehensible. She found herself wondering what it would look like if ever he should by chance speak tenderly.

"It is better that I leave you," she said, "since I no longer possess your full confidence."

"Are you worthy of my full confidence?" he asked, quickly.

"So far I have never abused it," she answered.

"For that very reason," he admitted, "I owe you frankness. You shall continue to have it. If you had studied history and philosophy of government, you would understand the truth of what I am going to tell you. All the beneficent legislation of the world is effected by moderate government, but a government, even

though it brings a country from the slough of despond to the fields of paradise, cannot exist for ever. The desire for change in an electorate is an inevitable and ineradicable instinct. Before many years are gone by I and my Government will disappear. To which extreme will Russia swing? Back to communism-cum-anarchy, or in the other direction towards a monarchy? There is a fear of both. That is why I, who theoretically hate all such things, keep up a wonderful secret service. I watch the anarchists and I watch your friends. Your friends, here at my invitation, are already conspiring. Both of the men to whom I gave posts in the army are already at work with royalist propaganda. Both of these are your relatives. For whom are you, Catherine Borans — for them or for me? "

" I am a Monarchist," she said proudly, " but it does not follow that I should betray your trust."

" The work which I have summoned Andrew Kroupki to do with me to-morrow," he went on, " concerns the future of Russia's two remaining armies, deals with the matter of the new conscriptions, and would be full of the most amazing interest to your relatives. They would read my proclamations before they were issued and be prepared with contra-propaganda. They would also learn the means I am taking to prevent serious trouble. You still wish to do the work? "

" If I am to remain your secretary," she answered with a certain unaccustomed doggedness.

" You will be here at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, then," he directed. " You will take a taxicab first to Government Buildings and collect your machine, both code books, and instruct Peter Tranchard, the head of the private printing department, to be prepared for important work during the afternoon. You will be en-

gaged here for the whole of the day. May I take it now that your notice is withdrawn?"

"If you wish," she answered a little wistfully. "But are you sure you still desire to keep me? Other people, if they knew who I was, would feel the same as General Trotsk. You would be considered very indiscreet to have a secretary with such connections."

He poured himself out some liqueur brandy and held the glass between his hands for a moment.

"Indiscreet," he repeated. "Yes, there is indiscretion in keeping you near me, Catherine Borans, but indiscretion of another sort."

She gave a little sigh of content. Her eyes challenged him.

"This sounds more interesting," she murmured. "Please go on."

"There is nothing further to tell you except this," he replied coldly. "The indiscretion consists in the fact that you are the only woman whom I have ever met in my life who could keep my thoughts turned away for a moment from the things that count. A coward would send you away. You see I have faith in myself."

"More interesting than I had even dared to hope," she exclaimed. "Have you never really cared seriously for any woman, then?"

"Never," he assured her fervently. "You are the only one against whom I have ever had to steel myself. The only one who has ever made me feel that there are lonely hours in a man's life."

"You were feeling like that, I suppose," she observed quite calmly, but with the ghost of a tremulous little smile at the corners of her lips, "the night you kissed me on the steamer."

For a moment she was afraid. She called back the

challenge from her eyes, but it was too late. His arm was around her neck, his lips pressed to hers. She almost lost her senses in a wave of turmoil, of impotent resistance to the torrent of passion which surged about her. The perfume of the roses which decorated the table remained in her thoughts for years afterwards. Just as she had found his arm around her absolutely without warning, so, in the same fashion, she saw him a moment or two later, leaning back in his high-backed chair, gazing at her with steady but burning eyes.

"As your host, I have transgressed," he admitted, "but I have the great excuse. If you had been any other woman and I had been any other man, I should have been your lover."

He lit a cigarette and smoked furiously. Twice she opened her lips and said nothing. The third time she spoke.

"But you are Samara," she murmured, her eyes swimming in the softness of incredible things, "and I am Princess Catherine of Imanoff. Well?"

He rose to his feet, almost with a bound, passed behind her chair, and before she could imagine what he meant to do was standing on the hearthrug, his finger pressed to the bell. It was answered almost immediately by Ivan.

"An automobile for Miss Borans," Samara ordered.

The man bowed low and departed, closing the door behind him. Catherine looked across at her host, still standing upon the hearthrug, and laughed softly.

"Dismissed," she sighed.

"Would you be willing to pay the price of staying?" he asked bluntly.

The laughter passed from her face. Some part of the wave of emotion which had driven him from her side suddenly surged up in her. Whether it was love or hate

she scarcely knew, but for the first time in her life she felt herself dominated.

"The President of the Russian Republic," he began hoarsely, "even though it were his desire, could never ——"

"Is it his desire?" she interrupted, with a sudden wild hatred of those heavy footsteps in the hall.

The door was thrown open. Ivan, tall and massive, stood to attention.

"The automobile awaits," he announced.

"Not later than nine o'clock in the morning, if you please, Miss Borans," Samara said, bowing his farewell.

She left the room slowly, — the room which seemed strewn with fragments of a dream. She followed Ivan down the hall and nodded good night to him carelessly as she stepped into the automobile. As she drove across the Square and came within hearing of the night-hum of Moscow, — a medley, it sounded to her, of strange music and hurrying footsteps — she found herself suddenly thinking of Sadie Loyes and the Hotel Weltmore Typewriting Bureau. It was like an anticlimax to her emotions. She began to laugh softly.

CHAPTER V

Alexandrina breathed a sigh of relief. She was entertaining an unexpected visitor whom she had found a little difficult.

"At last!" she exclaimed, as Catherine entered. "My dear child, what extraordinary accident has detained you? We have telephoned to Government Buildings and every place we could think of. You have met General von Hartsen, I believe."

The General bowed low and raised Catherine's fingers to his lips.

"In Monte Carlo," he murmured. "It gives me the greatest pleasure, Princess, to renew our acquaintance."

Catherine glanced around the room, conscious of an acute sense of mental fatigue, a desire for an impossible seclusion. Kirdorff was there and Cyril Sabaroff, the former in uniform, but if there had been other guests, they had all departed. She sank a little wearily into an easy-chair. She was the only one in morning dress and she was sensible somehow of a complete lack of sympathy with the little coterie gathered around her aunt's chair.

"I was working late," she explained with perverse candour, "and I stayed to dine at Government House."

General von Hartsen was interested.

"Does your work, Princess," he enquired, "still lead you into direct association with Gabriel Samara?"

"At times," Catherine admitted. "I dined with him to-night. I am working with him at Government House to-morrow."

There was a moment's silence.

"At Government House," Kirdorff repeated thoughtfully.

Catherine nodded. Her questioner moved a little nearer towards her.

"Have you any idea as to the nature of the work?" he ventured. "I ask, because we have information ——"

Alexandrina intervened with a wave of the hand.

"My dear Kirdorff," she complained, "you think of one thing, and one thing only. We admit your zeal, and we quite understand that Catherine's intimate association with Government work just now may prove of great benefit to our cause. At the same time, we would ask you to remember that General von Hartsen's mission is of the first importance with us at the present moment."

"Has General von Hartsen a mission?" Catherine enquired, a little flippantly. "Tell me, General," she went on, "how is that very hot-headed young charge of yours who followed me to London? You will have trouble with that young man when he grows up."

The General stiffened.

"Princess," he begged, "may I ask for your very serious attention to what I have to say?"

"Frankly I could not promise it," was the somewhat unexpected reply. "I am very sleepy and my nerves are all tangled. What about to-morrow, General? I feel, somehow or other, that to-morrow I shall be a different person. You are not hurrying away from Moscow, I hope."

"That depends upon you, Princess," he answered gravely. "My mission here is to lay a certain proposal before you."

"Not the same proposal as before, I trust!" Catherine exclaimed.

The General frowned.

"Princess," he said, "the circumstances and conditions under which I now approach you are entirely different. I asked you then to accept in marriage the suit of a German nobleman of royal descent, whose future was of no great account in the world. To-day I am here to beg for your hand in marriage to Prince Frederick of Wehrenzollern who, I pledge you my word, before twelve months have passed will be crowned Emperor of Germany."

"Matrimonially," Catherine murmured, "my destiny seems to lead me to high places. Have you not been informed, General, that I am already as good as betrothed to Prince Nicholas of Imanoff, the future Tzar of Russia?"

"It is upon that point that I desire to speak with you, Princess," was the earnest reply. "We Germans, if I may say so, are in the last lap of our struggle towards monarchy. The people are only waiting for a word and they will lift the roof off the Reichstag with their cheering. The present parliament is due to be dissolved in two months' time. The Government will then resign and not a single other statesman will attempt to form a fresh one. The President, who is also resigning, will send for Prince Frederick. He will make an announcement. You may hear the roar of German voices even to your frontier."

"Very interesting," Catherine admitted, "but do I understand that the object of your mission here is seriously to revert to the subject of a marriage between myself and Prince Frederick?"

"Dear and gracious young lady," Von Hartsen continued, "the matter now rests upon an entirely different basis. The road to monarchy in Russia will be a long and arduous one in any case. The aid of Germany is

the only thing which may shorten it by a span of years. As Kaiserin of Germany you will be able to do more for the cause of monarchy in this country than if you remain the betrothed of Prince Nicholas of Imanoff."

"Plausible," Catherine agreed, "but scarcely convincing. What has Nicholas to say to this?"

"Prince Nicholas," Kirdorff intervened, stepping forward, "was consulted before General von Hartsen left Berlin. He is deeply sensible of the potency of the General's arguments. The royalist cause will gain nothing outside Russia by the intermarriage of yourself and Prince Nicholas. You will indeed be looked upon doubtfully. Marriage between first cousins here is not too popular — especially after a decade of Soviet rule. Your marriage with Prince Frederick, on the other hand, would enable you to ensure the return of the monarchy to this country. Prince Frederick has pledged his word to make this a charge upon his conscience if you should accept his offer."

Alexandrina, who had been watching her niece a little anxiously, motioned her to her side.

"My dear," she said, "I am aware that this suggestion must have taken you completely by surprise. I quite appreciate the fact that you have not had time to think seriously about Frederick as a possible husband. You would furthermore consider yourself bound in honour to conclude your alliance with Nicholas. Nicholas, however, has had a very plain hint dropped to him. He has signified his intention to listen to reason."

"In other words Nicholas is quite agreeable to the transfer," Catherine remarked.

"It is for the good of his country," Kirdorff reminded her. "Nicholas is above all things a patriot."

"At the same time," Catherine pointed out, "this

trafficking in my affections seems a little sordid. Nicholas, it appears, is content to do without me. I have, in other words, regained my liberty. I insist upon spending the night in that state. To-morrow I will interview General von Hartsen at the earliest possible moment."

Alexandrina turned towards the frowning ambassador with an ingratiating smile.

"My niece's attitude appears to me to be correct, General," she said. "You must not be over-zealous on account of your young master. Lunch with us here to-morrow."

"Dine," Catherine put in softly. "I shall be away all day."

"Dine with us here to-morrow night, then," the Grand Duchess invited, "and my niece shall be prepared."

Von Hartsen rose a little unwillingly to his feet.

"I should have preferred to have telephoned favourable news at once to my august young friend," he confessed. "You will forgive my pointing out once more that the position he is able to offer his wife is absolutely and entirely unique. However, I am at Her Highness's disposition."

"I shall have made up my mind by dinner time," Catherine promised him. "It really is quite an important matter to me, you know."

"It is of vast importance to all Europe," the General agreed. "On the other hand, I cannot imagine where hesitation could arise."

Catherine smiled cryptically.

"Perhaps not," she admitted, "but then you see you have to do with a woman. I am not sure that I should not find the Court life at Berlin a little irksome."

"You, Princess," the General declared, "would be the Court. It would be for you to set its tone. It is

not for me to remind you that the lives of people even in the highest places have their relaxations at which even the historian can only guess."

He made his ceremonious farewells. They all waited until the door had closed behind him. Then a buzz of conversation started.

"My dear," her aunt told Catherine confidentially, "Nicholas has gone further in self-denial than we permitted General von Hartsen to know. He abnegates his personal wishes with joy. A friendly monarchy established at Berlin would assure our own triumph."

"There is not the slightest doubt that the German people are aching for their Kaiser," Cyril Sabaroff observed. "Frederick can scarcely walk the streets in comfort nowadays."

"Every illustrated paper has his picture," the Grand Duchess added. "You can read of his doings every day."

"And every newspaper has anecdotes about him," Kirdorff concluded. "He is easily the most popular young man in Europe to-day."

"I am very much flattered," Catherine pronounced, "and very sleepy. To-morrow I will make up my mind whether I shall be Kaiserin of Germany or Tzarina of Russia or ——"

There was a long pause. Rosa Sabaroff at last interposed.

"Or what, Catherine?"

Catherine looked back from the door towards which she had made her way.

"Or return to the Weltmore Typewriting Agency and my American independence!"

CHAPTER VI

CATHERINE came face to face with Andrew Kroupki as she was leaving her office in Government Buildings at an early hour on the following morning. He stood in the doorway, blocking her exit and his expression was menacing. She realised at once that there was to be trouble.

"One word with you, if you please, Miss Borans," he insisted.

She gave way and he closed the door behind him, confronting her with a spot of angry colour burning in his cheeks, wild-eyed and almost inarticulate.

"It is unbelievable!" he exclaimed. "You must not go to the Chief to-day! Stay here and I will make your excuses."

"What do you mean, Andrew?" she asked coldly. "I am directed to report myself at Government House before nine o'clock. Of course I must go."

"You must have begged for the work," he continued, his tone trembling with agitation. "It is not right that you should have it. It is not safe. It is a wicked thing!"

"Andrew, you are not yourself," she said gently, almost kindly. "Surely you know that I must obey orders."

"Orders! The Chief must be mad," he cried. "A moment's indiscretion with regard to to-day's work and a terrible situation might arise. You are not of us. You are not for the people of Russia. You are for those who are already beginning to plot against us."

"That is absurd," she told him. "You must not talk to me so, Andrew. I have never yet failed in my

trust wherever my sympathies may have lain. Besides, it is not for you to interfere. It is your master who speaks the word."

He shook for a moment, as though seized with an ague.

"You dined with him alone last night," he cried hysterically. "What was the argument you used to bring him to folly?"

"I have been very patient with you, Andrew," she said, with a warning flash in her eyes, "but I am reaching my limits. Perhaps if you desire to preserve my esteem, you had better stand on one side."

"I think," he sobbed, "that I would rather dig my fingers into your white throat and wring the life out of you than let you go to Samara to-day."

Sympathy once more chased the anger from her mind. It was obvious that he was unstrung, on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

"You are very foolish, Andrew," she declared. "The work of to-day is better done by me. You are a very bad typist and you are very slow with the new code. It is natural that the Chief should send for me. There are many matters of graver importance, I am sure, that he would leave in your hands."

Her kindness seemed only to throw fresh fuel on the fire of his anger. She suddenly realised that she was in actual physical danger. They were alone on the floor of the great building. No one arrived at the offices until nine o'clock and the cleaners had departed. She moved a little towards the telephone, but he seemed to apprehend her purpose and blocked her passage.

"It is false," he almost shouted. "He has lost his head. There is nothing more vital to the State than the scheme which he is to confide to you to-day. He has lost his head! You have bewitched him as you have

done me — Samara, to whom women have been but playthings! — the idlest of all his diversions!"

"You are becoming absurd," she said quietly. "Be so kind as to let me pass."

He shook his clenched fists in the air. His appearance was veritably tragic. Every moment he was more completely losing control of himself.

"You must answer my question or I think that I shall kill you," he gasped. "You know very well what it is. You could have saved me this torture. Is Samara your lover?"

Catherine looked at him steadfastly for a moment; looked at his long narrow face with its high cheek bones, his lips trembling like a woman's, at his eyes from which all the kindly dreaminess had gone. It seemed to take her a few seconds to realise the actual meaning of his words, but when she did, the strain of inherited savagery, which had made for purity amongst the women of her race and bravery amongst the men, leaped into fire in her veins. Her physical strength itself seemed to swell. With her outstretched hand, she struck Andrew Kroupki a blow on the side of the face with such unexpected force that he staggered back half-dazed, blood already commencing to trickle from the place where her ring had bitten into his flesh. Before he could recover himself she had gone. To his reeling senses the slam of the door, the click of her heels upon the polished floor, were full of evil portent.

She made no excuses when she arrived at her destination, though Samara was manifestly impatient. Their meeting of the night before seemed to belong to another world. Never, for a single moment did he depart from the rôle of exacting and conscientious employer. He did not even trouble to present to her Adolph Weirtz, the semitic, brilliant Minister of

Finance, who was present, but plunged at once into their work. At eleven o'clock Weirtz left. At one o'clock her fingers began to stumble. He looked at her sharply.

"What is the matter?" he asked curtly. "Do you need luncheon?"

"I do not think that I need it any more than any one else would," she replied. "Something of the sort is usual. Probably you would have noticed yourself that it is past one o'clock if you had breakfasted at seven and if you had not had the resources of your sideboard."

He suddenly and unexpectedly smiled.

"*Touché*," he confessed. "I am a selfish brute."

He rang the bell and gave Ivan a brief order. Then he crossed to the sideboard, concocted a strange amber-coloured drink which he forced upon her and pushed cigarettes to her side. He himself had been smoking a huge pipe most of the morning.

"At four o'clock," he confided, "the other two members of the Council will be here to approve. So much for my autocracy which you were talking about."

"And if they disapprove?" she asked.

"The proclamation will be issued just the same," he declared, with a sudden note of belligerency in his tone.

She laughed quietly; a relaxation which a moment or two later he found himself sharing. Afterwards he became almost apologetic.

"The principle is already decided upon by the Cabinet," he explained. "There can be no objection to anything except detail, and, so far as that is concerned, I am more likely to be right than any of them. You gathered that Weirtz was against the whole thing?"

"I tried not to listen," she replied. "I gathered that he was disapproving."

"He looks upon the army as our sole refuge against two smouldering factions of the community — the Royalists and the anarchists," Samara expounded. "He agrees that the anarchist influence to-day is negligible but he has an absurdly exaggerated idea of the significance of the royalist movement."

"So you admit that there is a royalist movement?" she asked him curiously.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I suppose so," he assented. "They're making noise enough, at any rate. To return to Weirtz. He thinks that the period of interregnum between the disbanding of the armies and the establishing of a citizen force will be a period of danger. I disagree with him. The idleness of a standing army makes it a constant menace; usually a hotbed for intrigue and conspiracy. They're hard at it now down there. They think I don't know, but I do. Your friend Kirdorff, a cold-blooded, brainy schemer; Orenburg — less brains but more courage. They took their commands willingly enough and drew their pay, and began to plot the next day. I've no great fancy for your friends, Catherine Borans."

She sighed.

"Why should you have? They look at life differently. They follow other gods."

"Eat your luncheon," he invited, as soon as Ivan had finished setting the table. "We must start work again directly. You must have some of this goulash. I never imagined I was hungry. Ivan, some Rhine wine and tumblers. Have you seen Andrew to-day?"

"I saw him at Government Buildings," she replied. "He was very angry and very rude."

"He doubts my wisdom in giving you this work," Samara confided. "He is quite right from his point of view. No one would do it unless it were some one

like myself, whose life is governed by instinct and not reason."

She smiled. "Andrew would never understand that."

"I am sorry for him," Samara declared abruptly. "He is jealous of you and at the same time he is in love with you — a painful condition of mind for a highly strung and extraordinarily susceptible young man."

"Were you insensible to all human weaknesses when you were young?" she asked.

"I? Mother of God, no!" he answered carelessly. "I had my fits of weakness and I yielded to them, when I chose, but they never formed part of my life. They were the rest houses in the night. They helped one to draw breath for the morrow. It is these romantic youngsters who seek to weave their follies into the web of durable things who are to be pitied. Ivan, some coffee," he ordered. "A cigarette, Catherine Borans. Now let us start. I have a new vision!"

At four o'clock Samara read the result of his day's work to Weirtz, his Minister of Finance, to Argoff, the Minister for Home Affairs, and to General Trotsk, the Chief of the Police. In an inner room Catherine sipped tea and listened. From the beginning she was conscious of the attitude of deferential opposition existing amongst Samara's colleagues. Argoff was the first spokesman.

"Sir," he said to Samara, "you have faithfully embodied in these proclamations and directions the decision of the Cabinet as arrived at last Thursday. We three were in a hopeless minority then; we are in a hopeless minority now. I personally look upon the action you propose to take as fraught with the greatest danger to the future of the Republic."

"And you, Weirtz?" Samara asked.

"I agree with Argoff," was the unhesitating reply. "The disbanding of the Third Army was sound and brilliant legislation. To go further in the same direction would, I think, expose the country to unnecessary dangers."

"What have you to say, General?" Samara concluded.

General Trotsk — a thin, grey man, with the face of a sphinx — was in reality the most discomposed of the three, although he did not betray it.

"Gabriel Samara," he said, "before you came into power there were those who called you a visionary. You have silenced your critics in the establishment of what might well become the greatest republic in the world's history. I beg you to beware lest one single mistake should bring to naught all that you have done."

"Aye, and more than that," Weirtz put in, "plunge this country once more into the throes of rebellion and disorder. To all appearance," he went on, "Russia is to-day a contented and happy nation, yet under the surface, as I very well know, there is discontent and grumbling because it is human nature that this should be so amongst the worthless, the quixotes, the criminals. There is always fuel for a burning brand. Frankly, my agent's report from Odensk is that the great mass of the Second Army do not desire demobilisation. A civilian life does not appeal to them. They like their uniform, the routine of their daily life, the freedom from all personal anxieties and responsibilities. They do not doubt your beneficent schemes for their welfare, but they prefer to remain soldiers. It is this feeling which is making them ready listeners to the propaganda which is going on amongst them."

"The love of the military life," Samara pronounced,

" is an unnatural affection. The sooner it is stamped out the better."

" Theoretically very right," Weirtz agreed, " but practically there are difficulties. Can even you, Gabriel Samara, force a million men out of a life which is dear to them, into a new and untried career? "

" Nonsense," was the impatient reply. " Half of them were peasant agriculturists in their youth, with land to till and a homestead to look after. They will soon find themselves. Besides, you and I, General, should know that the Russian soldier is never insubordinate. He will obey orders. There will be nothing else left for him to do. On the day these proclamations are posted, every ammunition dump in the camp will be blown up, and their bayonets withdrawn. It will be simply a million unarmed men, pouring through the great clearing house which will be ready for them next month at the rate of thirty thousand a day."

" It is to my mind," General Trotsk declared, " a most rash and hazardous experiment."

" Where is the hazard? " Samara demanded. " The First Army is within a day's march of the city, fully equipped and fully armed. But far be it from me to suggest such a thing as a conflict. Their mere existence would prevent it."

" There is yet another danger," General Trotsk pointed out. " Supposing word of this projected destruction of their ammunition were to reach the army; it would be easy enough for them to guard against it."

" Such a supposition infers the presence of a traitor amongst us," Samara argued. " Not another breathing soul knows my plans. Peter Tranchard, who controls the private printing press of the Home Office, you yourself would vouch for, Argoff. Not one of his composi-

tors can read, but, as in the case of the proclamation addressed to the Poles two years ago, these men are locked up in quarters for a week after their work is done."

"There is your secretary," Weirtz suggested bluntly.

"I will answer for her," Samara promised, with a flash in his eyes. "I admit the need for secrecy. It is because of it that I dealt with this measure before the Cabinet instead of the General Assembly. You have no reason to doubt the loyalty of the First Army, General?"

"There is some disquiet," Trotsk admitted. "I have only this morning caused seventy of my men to be enrolled in the ranks."

"The plot to reëstablish Soviet conditions," Weirtz remarked, "was never, I think, a serious one. I suspect that the plotting such as it is to-day, emanates from a different source."

"Royalist?" Samara enquired.

"Royalist, beyond a doubt," Trotsk affirmed. "The Russian of to-day hates the very sound of the word 'Bolshevist' or 'anarchist.' It is the reactionary swing of the pendulum which is to be feared. It is my firm belief that there are a million more Royalists in the country to-day than any one imagines."

Samara laughed confidently.

"There may be amazing surprises in store for us in this world," he said, "but I do not think that Nicholas Imanoff, bond seller of New York, will ever be crowned Tzar of Russia. You have read the proclamations, my friends. Apart from the fact that you are not in entire sympathy with me and with the majority of the Cabinet as to the policy of which they are the outcome, you have no criticism to make?"

"I have none except those I made before the Cab-

inet," Adolph Weirtz declared. "I maintain that as it seems to be the wish of the Cabinet that the Second Army should be disbanded, it should be done gradually — a hundred thousand a year, the men to be selected by lot."

"Too slow," Samara observed brusquely. "Anything else?"

"I propose," Trotsk said, "that you, sir, visit the district personally, address the soldiers, and study their disposition. I have reports from my subordinates every day which I find disquieting."

"That I have decided to do," Samara assented. "And you, Argoff?"

"I have but one suggestion to make," was the prompt reply. "Burn your morning's work, Mr. President, and expunge the decree from the archives of the Cabinet. You are trifling with destiny."

"Every reformer the world has ever known," Samara answered deliberately, "has sat at the table of chance."

Samara drew back the curtains of the inner room as soon as he was alone. Catherine came quietly forward to meet him.

"Well?" he asked. "You heard everything?"

"Everything!"

"And what is your opinion?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I am twenty-five years old," she said. "Twenty-three years of my life have been spent in New York. I am a Russian only by instinct. I have yet to learn the temper of my people."

"Never mind your lack of experience. Answer me from that instinct."

She acquiesced unwillingly.

"You have made Russia a great and prosperous country," she said. "You have succeeded in reducing

her army by a million men. I do not see why you take this further risk."

"Sophist," he growled. "Instinct only. I insist."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Yesterday," she confided, "I looked upon the royalist cause in Russia as a forlorn thing. To-morrow, if you persist, I shall begin to wonder what it would feel like to marry Nicholas and be Tzarina of all the Russias."

Samara seemed afflicted by a curious fit of lethargy after Catherine's departure. He sat in his great bare room till the twilight filled it with shadows; until, in fact, he was disturbed by stealthy footsteps behind his chair. He turned abruptly round. A tall, gaunt figure was standing before the safe. Samara, after a second's scrutiny, withdrew his hand from the butt of the pistol towards which it had sprung.

"Andrew!" he exclaimed. "What the devil are you doing here?"

The young man faced him. Even in the gloom of the apartment the wound on his cheek was clearly visible.

"I was restless, Master," he said. "I entered by the side gate. I have come to ask a favour."

"What is it, and what has happened to you?" Samara demanded.

"I have met with an accident," was the dreary confession. "Something very terrible has happened. I cannot breathe here in Moscow. I must get away."

"Go on."

"We were to start for London on Monday. Let me go by the early morning boat and wait for you there. There are things to be done before you arrive. I can see to them."

"What have you been doing to yourself?" Samara asked, looking at the scar upon his face.

"An accident has happened," Andrew replied. "A very terrible accident! I must get away at once. Give me permission to go to England, please."

"Is this because Catherine Borans has been working for me to-day?" Samara enquired bluntly.

Andrew shivered. He had winced at the sound of her name as though some one had struck him with a whip.

"I have no more feeling of that sort," he groaned. "It is finished. I simply want to get away."

Samara wrote a few lines upon a sheet of foolscap and passed them over.

"Very well," he assented. "There is your order, and the name of the hotel where you will stay when you reach London. If all goes well I shall follow you on Thursday."

"Aye, on Thursday," Andrew muttered.

Samara glanced at him curiously.

"Have you seen your doctor lately, Andrew?" he enquired.

The young man laughed bitterly.

"I am ill," he acknowledged, "but no doctor can cure me."

Samara indulged in a moment's deliberation. Distinctly something had happened.

"Are you sure that you are fit to travel?" he asked.

"If I stay here for another day, I shall shoot myself or some one else. Better let me go. I am of no use to any one just now. I could not work. I could not be trusted. Let me go, please."

"You are talking foolishly, Andrew," his master declared. "I have trusted you with the secrets of my life. You could not betray me if you would. There

is something beneath all this. Why not give me your confidence? "

"It is too late," Andrew groaned, shuffling towards the door.

Samara stopped him with an imperative monosyllable.

"Andrew," he asked, "is it a woman who has done this? Well, I see it is. I am going to use the surgeon's knife. Never in this world could Catherine Borans be anything to you."

The young man's face for a moment was like the face of a devil.

"Blast you, don't I know it?" he cried. "Don't I know whose woman she is? That's why I'm getting away — why I choose hell rather than stay here!"

For once his master's call was disobeyed. The slam of the door echoed through the huge half-empty house. Samara's few seconds of spellbound agitation were all the start Andrew needed. He was gone!

CHAPTER VII

CATHERINE, standing that evening in a corner of her aunt's little salon, with Nicholas in close attendance, watched, with a disquietude which she found it hard to conceal, the continual stream of visitors pouring all the time through the open doors. Alexandrina's first "At Home" six months ago had resulted in the visit of less than a dozen rather shabby, melancholy men and women, who seemed like the ghosts of their own unhappy pasts. Conversation had been almost pathetic and had consisted principally of reminiscences. They spoke of the great families which formed the connecting links between them, of the branches which had died out, of others whose members were scattered all over the world. To-day the memory of that first gathering seemed like a dream. There were at least a hundred and fifty visitors in the small suite of rooms, and more arriving all the time. The people, themselves, were different. There was an air of subdued interest, almost excitement, in their demeanour, a new spring in their walk, and a note of suppressed jubilance in many fragments of smothered conversation. Kirdorff was there in brilliant regimentals, surrounded by a little group of eager but cautious questioners. The names of the men and women who came and went so freely recalled all the splendours of a St. Petersburg Court of fifty years ago. Nicholas played with the hilt of his sword and stroked his incipient moustache with an almost fatuous air of self-satisfaction. Nearly every newcomer, after paying his or her respects to their hostess, came to address a few words to him. The presence of Mrs.

Saxon J. Bossington, in a dress of magenta velvet with a hat to match, her neck and arms ablaze with jewels, and a priceless ermine stole about her shoulders, seemed the only discordant feature, and even she, through sheer magnificence, presented a striking appearance.

"I wonder if all this is wise," Catherine murmured to her cousin.

He smiled condescendingly.

"You are afraid that it might offend your friend, Samara?" he observed with a superior smile.

"Thanks to whom you are no longer selling bonds in New York," she retorted sharply. "As it happens, I was not thinking of Mr. Samara. Is not full-dress uniform now against the laws of the country?"

"It may be," he admitted. "We shall soon make our own laws. Since that man's name has been mentioned, Catherine," he went on, "I have a word to say to you. The time has arrived when you should cease to be his secretary."

"Why?" she enquired.

He stared at her, as though astonished at her lack of comprehension.

"In the beginning," he explained, "your position was naturally of great benefit to us. Those times are passing. When one thinks of the future, it will not do for people to be able to look back and remember the time when you were his paid assistant."

"You seem quite sure that I am going to marry you," she remarked. "Is this because I have sent General von Hartsen back to Berlin?"

"Not at all," he answered confidently. "It is your destiny to be Tzarina of all the Russias. The other scheme was absurd."

"It seems almost a pity," she sighed, "that I was brought up in New York."

"Why?" he asked.

"One gets so foolishly democratic," she replied. "As a royal wooer I think I rather preferred Frederick. He quite lost his head about me."

Nicholas laughed scornfully.

"Frederick was a little premature," he observed. "Things may not move so quickly in Germany as he imagines. Tell me about General von Hartsen and his ridiculous mission. How did he take your refusal of his proposal?"

"Badly," she answered. "He left before dinner was half over to catch the night boat to Berlin."

"The worst of these Germans," he sneered, in a self-satisfied manner. "As soon as they are thwarted they lose their tempers."

Mrs. Bossington sailed up to them and Nicholas promptly made his escape.

"My dear," she exclaimed, "it's good to see some one who knew me in New York, where we were somebody! I am getting quite confused with all these Princesses and Duchesses and Grand Duchesses, and they tell me that after all, even if Saxon does buy the whole of that Ardenburg estate — dozens and dozens of square miles, my dear — he will only be a Count!"

"Well, that should do for a start," Catherine declared, smiling. "As a matter of fact," she went on, "if I were you, I wouldn't talk about it too much. I think my aunt and Nicholas and all of them here have rather lost their heads. To discuss such things openly, to speak of the future as we continually do, is treason to-day."

"You don't think there's any doubt about this thing coming off?" Mrs. Bossington asked anxiously.

"I prefer not to discuss it," Catherine replied. "I even go further. I think that it is in bad taste to speak

of it as blatantly as my people are doing. After all, we are here on sufferance."

"You came on sufferance, perhaps," Mrs. Bossington amended, "but you should hear what Colonel Kirdorff has to say about the army. Your friend Mr. Samara has been making himself pretty unpopular."

"The army is still not Russia," Catherine reminded her.

Mrs. Bossington smiled cryptically.

"I don't know whether you are aware," she remarked, dropping her voice a little, "that I was admitted to the last meeting of Colonel Kirdorff's secret council. There were delegates from the southern provinces, from Petrograd, and I don't know how many places. They all seemed to agree that the peasants at any rate and the lower *bourgeoisie* all want their Tzar back again. As for the army, there is scarcely an officer who isn't a Royalist, since the Germans got the sack, and the soldiers themselves are all furious against Samara because of this talk of disbandment. Saxon's no slouch, my dear, as you know, and he declares the whole thing's a cinch, as long as it's managed on a business footing. I want him to take an interest in politics. A man with a business head like his would be worth having anywhere. If he were Finance Minister, for instance, he might easily be made a Prince."

"I must go and talk to my aunt," Catherine said abruptly. "I quite realise all that you have done for my family and my friends, Mrs. Bossington, and I hope that some day you may be rewarded for it, but I earnestly advise you not to talk so openly of your hopes."

She crossed the room towards where her aunt was seated, the centre of an animated little group. She was on the point of being surrounded herself when two new guests were announced. As though of a purpose, the

major-domo who stood at the doors raised his voice as he spoke the names:

"General Trotsk — Captain Irdron."

The babel of conversation ceased as though by magic. It was amidst almost a complete silence that the two men, both clad in the plain dark uniform of the State Police, approached Alexandrina. The General saluted, as he came to a standstill before the hostess of the little assembly. Everybody seemed to recognise the sombre, almost menacing note which their arrival had introduced.

"Madame," he said, "I have taken the liberty of paying you a visit. I beg leave to present my aide-de-camp, Captain Irdron."

Alexandrina acknowledged the salute of her two visitors a little stiffly.

"You are very welcome, General," she replied. "I do not remember, however, that your name is upon my visiting list."

"Madame," was the somewhat curt retort, "by virtue of my office under the Republic, my name is upon any visiting list where I choose to place it. We will, since you prefer it, consider my visit official."

He saluted again and turned deliberately away, murmuring a word or two to his companion, who appeared to be taking notes of the names of some of those present. He exchanged a few cold words with Catherine.

"You find time occasionally, then, Mademoiselle, to attend social functions," he remarked.

"One has one's family duties," Catherine rejoined with faint irony.

The General turned on his heel. The silence in the room remained unbroken. Every one was curious, a little agitated. The Minister of Police approached Kirdorff, who was talking to Nicholas. His expression

was grim and official. The atmosphere of the salon became tense.

"Sir," he said, addressing Kirdorff, "I have to inform you that you are wearing a uniform which is contrary to the regulations of the Republican Government of Russia."

"In what respect is it at fault?" Kirdorff enquired.

"In every respect, sir," Trotsk answered harshly. "The uniforms worn by the officers in the Republican Army are supplied by Commissariat Department C. You are wearing a full-dress uniform of the monarchical army, abolished by law in nineteen-nineteen. Your name, sir?" he asked, turning to Nicholas.

"Nicholas Imanoff," was the contemptuous reply. "I was not aware that a policeman had anything to do with the uniform of the army."

The smile of the Minister of Police was gentle, almost urbane.

"Naturally you are ignorant of Russia and its military regulations," he murmured. "You have, I think, lived all your life in New York and been engaged in other pursuits. You will report at the War Office, to the Chief of the Staff, within a quarter of an hour. He will give you further instructions."

Kirdorff laid his hand on Nicholas' shoulder in time to check an angry retort.

"By what authority, sir, do you of the police," he demanded, "issue orders to officers in the Russian Army?"

The Minister smiled.

"Your long absence from the country, sir, is your only excuse for such a question," he declared. "I represent the supreme power in the country — the Armies of the Service of the State. You can obey my orders voluntarily or, in five minutes, under escort."

There was a brief pause. Kirdorff turned away, bowed low and raised his hostess's fingers to his lips.

"Madame," he whispered, "we do well to bend. Nothing must prevent my being able to rejoin the army."

"I have confidence in you, Colonel," she assured him.

The two men left the room. As soon as he was sure of their absence, the Chief of the Police himself saluted Alexandrina.

"Madame," he said, "I regret to have interrupted your social gathering and to have deprived you of doubtless honoured guests. I shall now take my departure. For the present," he added, "it is sufficient for me to remind you that in this city you are the guests of the Russian Republic."

"I am a Russian citizeness, Monsieur le Commissionaire," Alexandrina answered, with a touch of hauteur in her tone; "my opinions and my actions are a matter for my own conscience."

The Grand Duchess had at least the triumph of the last word, for her visitor made no reply. He left the room followed by his attendant. There was a little gasp as the door was closed behind them, a silence broken by old Prince Dromidor, eighty-seven years of age, back from his little villa at Kensington after thirty years' absence from his country, to pay his respects to the returned refugees.

"It is the beginning," he cried. "They have shown their fear."

Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington laid her hand upon Catherine's arm.

"My dear," she said impressively, "let me put you wise to one thing. I've lived in New York and I know. Don't you let your aunt get in wrong with the police.

What was he, an inspector or an assistant commissioner? "

Catherine smiled.

" As a matter of fact," she confided, " he is a Cabinet Minister. He is one of the three who, with Mr. Samara, rule Russia."

" Really! " Mrs. Bossington murmured, with some chagrin. " And I never met him! "

CHAPTER VIII

Samara greeted Catherine with a grin of delight when, in response to his telephone summons, she appeared at Government House on the following morning. General Trotsk's report had appealed immensely to his sense of humour.

"So your aunt is giving royalist tea parties," he remarked, "and your relatives are sporting the uniforms of the Imperial Guard. Were you there when the fun began?"

"I was there," she admitted. "I didn't think it very funny."

"You are quite right," he confessed. "It is not funny. It is pathetic. These people have lived in the past so long that they have taught themselves to believe in its reincarnation. All the same, your aunt seems to have been behaving very badly."

Catherine shrugged her shoulders.

"Is there any reason why she should not entertain her old friends?" she enquired.

"Not the slightest," Samara agreed. "I should not have interfered in a thousand years. Trotsk takes himself too seriously. He speaks already of the royalist movement — as though there could be such a thing."

"General Trotsk may err too much in one direction," Catherine observed. "As an impartial looker-on, I should say that you erred too much in another."

"Are you an impartial looker-on?" he asked quickly. "Trotsk will have it that you are one of the gang."

"I am a Royalist at heart, of course," she acknowledged, "but I am not a conspirator."

"What have you been doing to Andrew Kroupki?" he asked abruptly.

"Quarrelled with him, more or less," she replied. "As a matter of fact, the quarrel was not of my seeking. He insulted me the other morning."

"Is it true that you knocked him down?"

"Perfectly," Catherine admitted. "I was delighted to find how strong I was."

Samara looked at her gravely.

"It is a terrible thing," he declared, "for a man to strike a woman, although she often deserves it. For a woman to strike a man is a tragedy. What was his offence?"

Catherine had seated herself at her table a few yards away. She swung round and faced her questioner.

"He asked me if you were my lover," she said coolly.

"A very natural question," he remarked, taking up a pile of letters and beginning to look them through. "Was that your only provocation?"

She turned away, opened her desk, and drew out her work.

"I have always understood," she reflected, "that the standard of morals amongst the educated portion of the Russian *bourgeoisie* was exceedingly low."

"Meaning me?" he asked cheerfully.

"Yes."

"The cap, alas, does not fit," he assured her. "I have no pretensions to rank amongst the *bourgeoisie*. I am of peasant stock."

"You do not surprise me," she replied.

He rose to his feet and set into operation the machinery which unlocked the great private safe. In a minute or two he appeared with a roll of manuscript.

"Please get on with this manifesto," he begged.

"You are at your best this morning. It would be a pity to waste such intelligence."

She took the papers. "I should like to know what has become of Andrew," she said.

"He has gone to London as my advance agent. I do not think that he will ever come back — not unless you leave me. Of course," he went on, "if this little tea-party scheme of your aunt's comes off, you are booked for the part of Tzarina, I suppose."

"There is always that hope," she admitted.

"Heaven preserve me from another woman secretary!" he exclaimed. "One never gets the last word."

Catherine was studiously silent. Samara waited for a moment or two. Then he left the room, slamming the door violently. It was an hour before he returned, and when he did he closed the door behind him and locked it. Catherine looked up questioningly.

"What is that for?" she asked.

"So that you don't leave me before I am ready for you to go," he answered. "Also to make sure that we are not interrupted."

"It seems a little absurd," she complained. "I have no idea of going until I have finished my work."

"How long will that take you?"

"Another half an hour."

"Finish it, then," he directed. "Afterwards I have something to say to you."

She continued her task. Samara studied a handful of the documents which he had brought back with him, signing some and throwing others on one side. Once or twice he spoke on the telephone. Finally Catherine turned towards him.

"I have finished," she announced. "Will you check my transcription?"

"Presently," he acquiesced.

"You had something to say to me," she reminded him.

"I had. I find that after all old Trotsk wasn't such an idiot. There is a genuine monarchist plot afoot."

She sat watching him, without faltering, with no sign of self-consciousness.

"Started in your aunt's drawing-room without a doubt," he went on, "subscribed to and joined in by all that shabby down-at-heel crew I brought home from a second-rate American boarding-house, making its way in the army, they tell me — especially the Second Army. Do you know that I have to postpone my journey to England and go down to Odensk to harangue these recalcitrant subjects? That's the result of trying to make good Russians of men like Kirdorff and Orenburg. What do they care about Russia? It's their blasted selves they think of."

"They have a right to their convictions," she rejoined.

"And I have a right to have them shot," he answered. "They've been guilty of treason against the State. Trotsk has just given me a copy of one of Kirdorff's speeches to the Fourth Army Corps. He'd have been tried by court-martial and shot a few years ago. I hate to kill fools, but something must be done. Trotsk would have the whole lot out of the country, or facing the firing line in ten minutes, and I am not sure that he isn't right. Advise me, Miss Secretary. What am I to do with this nest of vipers? Not much poison about them, but enough to hurt, Trotsk says. Tell me how to deal with them."

"Too great a responsibility for me," she replied.

"What if I were to shoot Nicholas Imanoff, or banish him?" he suggested. "There isn't another Imanoff amongst them. They can't make a Tzar out of an ordinary person, can they — even an aristocrat?"

"There is me," she remarked meditatively. "I am an Imanoff. They might make me Tzarina and permit me to choose my consort."

"You had a predecessor," he reminded her scornfully. "A pretty mess you'd make of things!"

"That would depend upon my consort," she replied. "I might choose you. How would you like that?"

He stood like a statue, looking at her across the bare, lofty room. She was not near enough to see the knuckles whiten about his clenched fists or to catch the fugitive gleam of something unusual in his hard, brilliant eyes. She noticed with surprise, however, the slight break in his voice.

"Curse you, can't you ever be serious?" he exclaimed. "I've a good mind to throw the lot of them into prison."

"I should only intercede on behalf of my aunt," Catherine assured him. "She is really quite a dear old thing, but Tzardom to her is very much like his Bible to an English Methodist."

The private telephone on Samara's table rang. He picked up the receiver and listened for a moment or two, frowning. Then he nodded and laid it down.

"Your friends," he said, turning to Catherine, "are beginning to annoy me. Trotsk is outside with an amazing story. You had better stop and listen to what he has to say."

General Trotsk was ushered in shortly afterwards. He entered the room and saluted, looking grimmer than ever.

"Sir," he announced, "I have a report to make."

"I am at your service, General," Samara replied.

The visitor indicated Catherine with a little wave of the hand. Samara only smiled.

"I should prefer you to speak before Miss Borans," he said. "I have a certain amount of confidence in her,

but apart from that, she is in a way responsible for my ever having invited this nest of conspirators over here."

"Miss Borans may yet find, then, that her responsibility is a heavy one," General Trotsk declared, with portentous coldness. "I have already reported, sir," he continued, "that I found Colonel Kirdorff and Lieutenant Nicholas Imanoff attending a private function yesterday wearing the uniform of the late Imperial Army. I ordered them to report at once at the War Office. It has now come to my knowledge that they failed to do so. They left the city instead, travelling by motor car in the direction of Odensk."

Samara nodded.

"Well," he remarked, "I suppose you did not allow them to get very far?"

"They were arrested by my orders at Miltou," the General went on, "and were brought back to the city under escort. I am here to ask your instructions, sir. The Minister of War is at Odensk, as is also General Denkers, commanding the Second Army."

Samara glanced at his watch.

"Bring them here at three o'clock," he directed. "I will deal with this matter summarily."

The Minister of Police saluted.

"I have your permission, sir, to speak frankly?" he asked.

"By all means," Samara replied. "You can discard officialdom altogether if you will. Light a cigarette and speak to me as my trusted minister."

The Minister of Police made no movement towards the box of cigarettes which Samara proffered. Catherine was watching him from across the room with fascinated eyes. There was something inhuman about this man's slow, deliberate speech, his waxen complexion, his

lack of all earnestness; something sinister about the cold detachment of his words.

"My reports as to the condition of the morale of the Second Army are unsatisfactory," he declared. "These two men in their persons and by their precepts have broken the laws of Russia and are largely responsible for the disaffection. I recommend that under Section Seven of the Military Discipline Act they be shot this afternoon. It is possible that such action will avert grave results."

"I shall bear what you say seriously in mind, General," Samara promised.

The Minister of Police saluted stiffly and withdrew. Samara waited until the door was closed behind him.

"You heard Trotsk's suggestion," he observed, turning to Catherine. "It seems to me that your chances of wearing that crown are slipping away."

CHAPTER IX

Samara broke through precedent that afternoon. He consented to receive a visitor who came without an appointment. Alexandrina, her good-humoured face wrinkled with anxiety, her clothes badly arranged, and out of breath already with the exertion of climbing the long flight of steps and crossing the great stone hall of Government House, was ushered into his presence. Nothing of the *grande dame* remained but her manner.

"I owe you my thanks for receiving me, Mr. Samara," she said, as he rose to greet her. "Will you allow me to sit down? I am out of breath. I remember your house and that flight of steps when it was the palace of my cousin, the Grand Duke Cyril. In those days, however, steps meant nothing to me."

Samara placed a chair for her with grave courtesy and returned to his own seat. He preserved his somewhat ominous demeanour.

"I have been trying to find my niece," Alexandrina continued. "At Government Buildings they would not admit me. I thought, perhaps, that she might be here."

"She will arrive in half an hour," Samara confided. "She is now at Government Buildings finishing some work for me. If you would care to wait for her here, my housekeeper shall show you a salon where you may be comfortable."

"Thank you very much," was the grateful reply, "but since I am fortunate enough to have your ear for a moment, I will tell you my mission. I came to ask Catherine to intercede with you on behalf of my hot-headed nephew and Colonel Kirdorff."

"On what grounds, madame?" Samara asked.

"Nicholas is young and he is an Imanoff," she said. "This is his Russia by the grace of God. How can he be expected to yield to the discipline of an artificial constitution?"

A slight smile played about Samara's lips. This was greater candour than he had expected.

"Madame," he reminded her, "I did myself the honour of paying you a visit a few weeks ago. Rumours of the activities of your friends had reached me. I offered you then a warning. You had accepted the hospitality of the Republican Government of Russia. In plotting against it, you or any other were guilty of a dishonourable action."

"Mr. Samara," Alexandrina said simply, "I cannot argue with you. I live by my convictions. You are without doubt a great statesman and you have been a great benefactor to this country. I appeal to you only as a man. I beg that you will not treat Nicholas' misdemeanour too seriously."

"I have heard you, madame," Samara replied. "I can make you no promise. I am the servant of the State."

The Grand Duchess rose to her feet. Samara's face was like stone. She knew very well that further speech was useless.

"At least," she concluded, "I thank you for receiving me. I read in New York, and I have been told here, that your régime in this country is one of mercy. I shall pray for your forbearance, sir, and for you, if you extend it to my nephew."

She left the room, escorted by Ivan, and without further word from Samara. He sat in his chair for a time, thoughtfully studying the mass of papers, by which he was surrounded. Presently Catherine entered,

carrying her despatch box. She came straight over to his desk.

"The work is finished," she announced. "You will remember that Andrew is not here. Do you wish me to communicate with the Chief of the Ministerial Printing Press?"

"Presently," he answered. "Lock the despatch box in the safe."

"I do not understand the mechanism," she reminded him.

He rose to his feet and began to demonstrate it. She suddenly seized his arm.

"Why do you trust me like this?" she expostulated. "You seem surer of me than I am of myself."

"I must trust some one," he observed. "Andrew was the only other person who knew the secret and he is not available."

"But why me?" she protested. "You know that there are reasons why you should not."

"I trust or distrust by instinct only," he replied. "I govern in the same way."

"Then you make a gamble of life and government," she declared. "Sooner or later the crash will come."

"Meanwhile watch me," he directed. "The combinations you will have to learn."

Presently the telephone bell rang. He took down the receiver and his face hardened as he listened.

"In ten minutes," he decided.

Catherine turned towards the door. He called her back.

"Have you nothing further to say to me?" he asked.

"Nothing," she answered.

"You know that your aunt has been here?"

"I have been told so," she admitted. "I can add nothing to what she has probably already said."

"Your personality might have more weight," he suggested.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Put it in the scale then, by all means," she enjoined.

"In plain words," he persisted, "you are too proud to ask a favour of me."

"I know you too well," she assured him. "You will do what you choose, what you think fit and right. Nothing that I or anybody else in the world could say would make any difference."

Her hand was upon the door. Again he called her back.

"I desire you to remain during my interview with your friends," he said. "They will be here almost immediately."

"Why should I be present?" she asked coldly.

"So that you may know the truth without perversion. Go to your desk in the alcove. You can hear there but you will be invisible."

She still hesitated.

"I have every instinct towards insubordination," she told him.

"Conquer them," he insisted. "I may need you to bear witness for me in the future."

She had scarcely reached her alcove before General Trotsk was ushered in. Kirdorff and Nicholas Imanoff followed, wearing military greatcoats buttoned to their throats. Behind came a guard of two soldiers with fixed bayonets. The Minister of Police saluted.

"According to your instructions, sir," he announced.

Samara seated himself at his desk. Kirdorff and Imanoff stood opposite to him; on either side of them a soldier, the Minister of Police, immovable and grave, a few feet away.

"Boris Kirdorff and Nicholas Imanoff," Samara began, "less than twelve months ago you accepted my offer to return to this country and become Russian citizens. I gave you both posts in the Republican Army. I told you that I was prepared to view your monarchical principles with toleration. Every one in this country has a right to his own opinions and has a right also to ventilate them. So far as you could influence people openly and honourably, by lectures and literature, you were at liberty to do so. You have ignored the honourable means of propaganda. You have stooped not only to underground conspiracy but to conspiracy with a foreign power. You have made use of your position in the army to initiate a seditious plot amongst the soldiers of the State, directed against this Republic. Do you require evidence? I can give it to you."

"I desire no evidence," Kirdorff replied. "It is quite true that I have endeavoured to awaken the people of Russia to a sense of what is due to themselves and their natural ruler."

"And I," Nicholas added, "being by descent and the grace of God, Tzar of all the Russias, can be guilty of treason to no one."

"A very comfortable self-assurance," Samara remarked with a faint sneer. "To proceed to a minor point. You were discovered yesterday wearing a uniform which is contrary to the regulations of the army in which you serve."

"So long as there is a Russian army," Nicholas argued, "so long must there be a regiment of Imperial Guards."

"An entire fallacy," Samara assured him. "To continue. You were directed by the Chief of Police to report at the War Office. You failed to do so."

"We are only subject to military discipline," Kirdorff observed.

"You display a shameless ignorance of existing conditions," Samara said sternly. "The Chief of Police ranks as a Major General in the army. To disobey his orders amounts to gross insubordination, the penalty for which you know."

"On a technical point," Kirdorff admitted, "we appear to be guilty. I have never in my experience connected any part of the civil administration with the army."

"It should be your duty to learn the regulations of the army whose uniform you wear and whose pay you draw," Samara reminded them coldly. "You are both, on your own showing, guilty of military insubordination and treason against the Army of the Republic. The penalty for both offences is death."

"I demand to be tried by court-martial," Kirdorff exclaimed.

"And I," Nicholas echoed.

"Again your ignorance of the regulations amazes me," Samara declared. "I am the Commander in Chief of the Russian Republican Army. I and General Trotsk form an ever-existing court-martial, empowered to deal summarily with any cases which we direct to be brought before us."

For the first time both men lost confidence. Nicholas' air of somewhat fatuous bravado had disappeared and he was tugging nervously at his moustache. Kirdorff was obviously taken aback.

"Your republic, then," he ventured, "is a more autocratic institution than any monarchy which I remember."

"Your criticism may be just but it is irrelevant," Samara observed. "We are a competent tribunal, your

offences are acknowledged. The penalty is beyond dispute. Have you anything further to say as to why this sentence should not be carried out upon you? "

"The army will rise to a man," Nicholas threatened, shaking with emotion.

"Young sir," Samara enjoined, "you would be wiser to omit all mention of an army in which you have served merely to gain your own purposes. Furthermore, half-past five is the time at which our firing parties generally parade. Odensk is some distance away."

Nicholas was almost beside himself with mingled fear and passion.

"It is unheard of, this," he cried. "I have still my American citizenship. I appeal!"

"Spare me a few illusions," Samara begged. "For a Russian seeking to obtain a lofty position in his own country by virtue of his birth to attempt to shelter himself in a moment of danger under a foreign flag is scarcely in accord with the traditions of your race. Now, listen to me, both of you. I have addressed you as a judge to the offenders brought before him. Your crime is admitted. The penalty is acknowledged. Now, I am going to speak to you as one human being to another."

A sudden gleam of hope flashed in Kirdorff's eyes. Samara paused for a few minutes as though to collect his thoughts.

"From the point of view of an ordinary human being," he continued, "you two cannot be judged as normal malefactors. Behind everything that you have done there stands, if not an excuse, a reason. How you can justify yourselves as men of honour, I do not know. You have accepted my invitation to come here. You accepted the positions I offered you in the army, and you started at once to plot against the Government of

a country which has never been so stable and prosperous as she is to-day. I will still bear with you. I will look upon you as men afflicted with a Jesuitical turn of mind. You believe that the code of honour may be abnegated if the cause itself be great enough. Very well. You believe that monarchy is a great cause. You believe that Russia would be better governed by a monarchy than it is as a republic. I believe the contrary. Very well. Go and preach your doctrines, and I will preach mine. If you can convert this country to Tzardom, do so. Only, do it, in future, openly, not by conspiracies and sedition. Don't pretend to be faithful soldiers of the Republic, when you only wear their uniform to preach treason against it."

The two men stood with their eyes fastened upon Samara. Nicholas was moistening his lips nervously. Kirdorff had already realised that respite was at hand. The most gloomy figure was that of the Minister of Police.

"My decision is this," Samara concluded, turning to the latter. "You will escort these two ex-soldiers of the Republic to your headquarters, where you will strip them of their uniforms and provide them with civilian clothes. You will expunge their names from the Army List, but you will give them passes to cross the lines at Odensk and to travel wherever they will in the country. That is all. Remove your prisoners, General."

"We are to be set free?" Nicholas gasped.

"I hoped that I had made myself clear," Samara observed drily.

"You will permit me to say, sir," Kirdorff ventured, "that you are treating us in an extremely chivalrous fashion."

Samara rose to his feet.

"I do not desire your thanks," he said. "As crim-

inals, I have absolved you. As men of honour, I shall be glad to be relieved of your presence."

The Minister of Police knew better than to argue. He made his protest, however.

"You have allowed yourself the luxury of quixotic altruism, sir," he said, "at the expense of your duty to the Republic."

"That may be the verdict of posterity, General," Samara replied. "If so, I must accept it."

The little procession filed out, Kirdorff and Nicholas alike momentarily drained of dignity, men to whom unexpected generosity had brought a sense of shame. Samara sat still at his desk and waited. There came no sign from Catherine. He rose to his feet and crossed the room at last to her alcove. On the threshold he stood still, amazed. She was leaning forward, her head buried in her hands, her shoulders convulsed. He came a little nearer.

"Catherine," he said quietly.

She held out her hand towards him without looking up. He gripped it tightly. Then he leaned over her. He asked no questions — there was that much of understanding between them. He kissed her fingers tenderly and turned away. Ivan's stentorian voice was announcing the arrival of his Cabinet in the outer room.

CHAPTER X

CATHERINE, a little tired, a little anxious, more than a little unhappy, lay stretched upon the sofa in her aunt's drawing-room, smoking an after-dinner cigarette. Opposite her, Alexandrina, with half a dozen newspapers by her side, her spectacles slipped on to the edge of her nose, her voice unsteady with excitement, was reading aloud occasional paragraphs.

"Listen to this, Catherine!" she exclaimed. "This is from the leading socialist paper in Berlin:

"THE POLITICAL CRISIS STILL CONTINUES

"Herr Brandt has confessed himself wholly unable to form a ministry and Dr. Beither has also refused responsibility. Meanwhile the Imperialist Party have openly avowed that they are in a position at any time to form a government which will command the entire support of the whole country. Prince Frederick is unable to leave his house in the Wilhelmstrasse owing to the crowds which surround it night and day. The announcement of a change of constitution is expected hourly."

Catherine listened unmoved.

"I seem to have missed a great chance," she murmured. "The young man was very much in love with me."

Alexandrina smiled.

"You are one of the fortunate ones of the earth, Catherine," she said. "No other woman in history has quite occupied your position. You could have been Kaiserin of Germany, and instead you will become Tzarina of Russia."

Catherine poured herself out some coffee from the copper pot which stood by her side. She clapped her hands and a somewhat uncouth-looking Russian servant entered.

"Sugar, Paul," she ordered, "and the samovar for Her Highness. See if that is a later edition of the paper they are calling in the street, too."

The man withdrew stolidly.

"Even if the Royalists succeed in Germany," Catherine continued, "I cannot see that our chances are much improved. They have no Samara to deal with there."

"Gabriel Samara is a great man," her aunt admitted, "but his dominion is on the wane. His ministers have allowed all the power to drift into his hands simply because they have had no will to resist. Many have resented it, however. His final proposals with regard to the completion of this demobilisation scheme are unpopular throughout the whole country. They only passed the Duma by less than a dozen votes."

Catherine leaned back thoughtfully, with her hands clasped around her knees.

"He is rash like all great men," she said. "He should have gone more quietly with these altruistic ventures of his. The people do not understand, and he is always a little impatient of opposition. But he has genius, and a man with genius is not easily crushed."

The servant returned with the sugar and the evening paper. Alexandrina glanced the latter through.

"Nothing fresh," she declared. "Samara is to address the last of his series of meetings at Odensk tonight."

The door was thrown open. General Orenburg was announced. They both turned towards him eagerly.

"Any news?" Catherine asked.

"Nothing within the last few hours," the General answered, seating himself by his hostess's side on the divan. "I came, wondering whether you had heard anything from Kirdorff."

"Nothing," Alexandrina replied. "The news from Berlin is amazing."

"Amazing indeed," Orenburg assented. "Six months ago the German Liberal Party appeared to have an ample majority and to be thoroughly established. The Imperialists scarcely dared to let their voices be heard. They were the weakest party in the State. Now a cataclysm seems to have taken place, a fever seems to have spread throughout the country. Every moment one expects to hear that Frederick has been proclaimed Kaiser."

"What do you think about the position here?" Catherine enquired curiously.

"In the light of what has happened in Germany, it is hard to say," the General admitted. "Six months ago Samara was his country's god, and the Duma were prepared to follow him blindly. If there had been another election he could have nominated every candidate. To-day there seems to be a strange undercurrent of political reaction. The people do not understand this demobilisation. The peasants and work-people are afraid of undue competition, the soldiers of privations, the *bourgeoisie* of invasion. They have suddenly begun to wonder whether their idol is only a great theorist. How far the pendulum will swing back, I cannot tell. We know that the Russian people are faithful and dogged. It seems hard to believe that in a few months' time they could forget and discard the man who slew their dragon."

"Samara has ruled Russia for fifteen years," Alexandrina said solemnly — "ruled her for her own good,

we must admit, but ruled her like an autocrat. All the same, just as I believe in God as our spiritual Master, so I believe that every human being is born with the reverent instinct and desire for temporal government by an anointed head. Germany's period of madness lasted for a short time only. When France, too, comes to her senses and an Emperor reigns once more at Versailles, then the wounds of the world will be healed and not before. So far as we are concerned, there has never been a time like the present. If we can secure the army, our moment may have arrived."

Once more the door was hurriedly opened, this time to admit a more unexpected arrival. Nicholas Imanoff entered, wearing a long brown leather coat and carrying dark spectacles in his hand. He was still a little breathless and had the air of one who has just concluded a rapid journey.

"Have you heard the news from Berlin?" he cried.

"Nothing for some hours," Orenburg replied.

"Frederick was proclaimed Kaiser early this afternoon!" he announced. "The whole city is *en fête*, and to-morrow has been declared a national holiday!"

"Wonderful!" Alexandrina murmured, the tears standing in her eyes.

"What news of Odensk?" the General asked.

"Samara is like King Canute," Nicholas pronounced. "He has a great following there. He is enthusiastically received, but the men are on our side, and he cannot keep back the tide."

"You have a mission here?" Orenburg enquired.

The young man nodded, threw his coat over the back of a chair, and called to the domestic for brandy.

"I have flown from Odensk," he explained. "All goes well, but one of our recruits insists that there are now in print secret orders to every army corps com-

mander, to be issued some time within the next week, which might affect our plans. It is absolutely necessary that we get hold of those orders."

He looked across at Catherine. She tossed her cigarette into the fire and smiled at him pleasantly.

"You seem to have established a secret service already, Nicholas," she remarked.

"Kirdorff is organiser," he acknowledged. "I speak in his name. It is he who has found out about these proclamations and secret orders. They are in code at present, but I think we could find some one who could deal with them. Do you know anything about them, Catherine?"

"Very likely," she replied.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "Kirdorff hates mystery. He had always felt that Samara had something up his sleeve or he would never have dared to make this an open struggle."

"'Dare' is scarcely the word to use in connection with Samara," Catherine observed. "He may have made glorious mistakes but he has the courage of a lion."

"No one wishes to deny that Samara is a great man," Nicholas declared, a little impatiently. "His time is over, though. If he behaves sensibly and leaves the country without provoking a conflict, no harm will happen to him. Catherine, I want a copy of that secret order. I shall fly back with it to Odensk to-night."

"How do you know that I can give it to you?" she demanded.

"That is of no consequence," he answered. "The knowledge has come to us. It was you alone who worked for Samara on the day when he thought out his scheme. Why do you hesitate? What other reason had you for working for this man than to aid the cause?"

Catherine rose from the sofa, shook out her skirt and stood by her aunt's side.

"Aunt," she said, "what is your opinion? I became Mr. Samara's secretary intending to betray him at the first possible opportunity. I am still a Royalist, I am still as anxious as any of you to see Nicholas Tzar of Russia. On the other hand, Samara is a great and honourable man. Shall I do well — I, a Princess Royal of Russia — to betray his confidence?"

Alexandrina looked a little disturbed. She was almost brutally frank.

"My dear," she confided, "I never dreamed that you would hesitate for a single moment."

Catherine turned to Orenburg.

"What is your opinion, General?" she asked him.

"I sympathise with your position, Princess," he said, "but the Cause must come before everything."

Catherine was standing in the glow of a tall rose-shaded electric standard. Her expression was unusually serious. Nicholas, fresh from the drab barbarities of a huge garrison cantonment, thought that she had never appeared so desirable.

"The best friends in the world," she said, "must sometimes agree to differ. I am a Royalist and by any honourable means I would try to help Nicholas. The thing you ask of me I will not do."

"You desert us?" Nicholas exclaimed with passionate emphasis.

"I do nothing of the sort," she replied. "I am against Samara; I am for you, but let us fight fairly. Samara himself has set you a great example."

Nicholas poured himself out more brandy. His fingers were shaking. He dared not trust himself to speech. Alexandrina stretched out her hand and took up her knitting.

"If Catherine has made up her mind," she remarked, "it is of no use trying to change her."

"The young are like that," General Orenburg agreed with quiet resignation. "As they grow older, the light they carry burns less brightly, and the journey becomes easier. The Princess must have her way."

Nicholas indulged in one final outburst. He set down his tumbler empty and caught up his coat.

"I am to go back, then, and report failure," he protested. "I am to report that whilst we may sell our souls and bodies for the Cause my affianced wife has scruples about betraying the confidences of a usurper. We shall find another way into the secret, though. Be sure of that."

"I doubt it," Catherine rejoined coldly.

Nicholas forgot for a moment to be cautious.

"You think that it is your secret and his alone," he sneered. "You are mistaken. There is another."

"There is only Andrew Kroupki," she declared, "and he is in London."

Nicholas buttoned up his coat without a word.

"I had hoped to stay a little longer," he said, kissing his aunt's fingers. "Catherine's decision drives me back to the camp at once, however. I must let them know of my failure."

He hurried off. Between Catherine and him there passed only the slightest of farewells. They heard the front door slam and the sound of his automobile driving away. Alexandrina rose with a little sigh, fetched the cribbage board and sat down opposite to the General. Catherine moved to the window and stood listening to the cry of the newspaper boys in the street.

CHAPTER XI

The mind of Europe was suddenly swayed and distorted by an avalanche of strange happenings. Once more the Imperial flag flew from the Royal residences in Berlin and Potsdam. A proclamation, studiously moderate in tone, almost democratic in its general outline, and without a single bombastic reference to the military powers by whose machinations his success had been achieved, had marvellously consolidated the young Emperor's position. Austria was reported to be on the point of begging for inclusion in the German Empire. Italy, with the grasp of the Socialists upon her throat, could only look on and wonder. France, with a deep groan, went at once into military conclave, counted her armies and found them insufficient, inspected her forts and found them vulnerable, but with the amazing and patient heroism of her race, set herself to face the inevitable. England, the most faithful subscriber to the Limitation of Armaments which Germany had so flagrantly disregarded, postponed the Peace Conference and sent out half a dozen commissions of ingenuous and credulous men to study conditions in the various countries which had subscribed to the League. America looked on from afar and tried not to feel the thrill of gratitude and superiority with which her great ocean barrier usually inspired the less far-seeing of her citizens. Russia itself, after twenty years of peace and content, felt the throb of political emotion — a new sensation in her giant body. She was bewildered at the strength of her own feelings. The more intelligent portion of the community looked with something like reverence upon that amazing rekindling of monarchical, al-

most religious sentiment on the part of the peasant class. Only a minority of them could remember rule under Tzardom; could remember the whispers of "a little father," a being nearer than God in their thoughts, as making a more tangible and real appeal to their imaginations. Samara's action, regarded with wondering admiration in other countries, almost stunned his own supporters. He dissolved the Duma as soon as he recognised the strength of the monarchist movement and issued a proclamation in every electoral district requiring the people to nominate their representative on the question of the constitution of the country. He himself, immersed in the one scheme so near his heart, yet the scheme which had temporarily shaken his power, remained at Odensk and in the neighbourhood, patiently addressing audience after audience of his dissatisfied soldiery, trying to convince the most difficult race upon the earth, realising his slow progress, yet fascinated with his task and deaf to the pleadings of his advisers to seek a wider field. The acme of his quixotism, however, was yet to come.

Catherine found herself living in an atmosphere of excitement from which she was to some extent excluded. Alexandrina, after Nicholas' visit, had never once alluded to its purpose. Nevertheless, Catherine had felt the veil fall. She discussed the situation with no one but she pondered over it. She compared the Russia of her dreams with the Russia which Samara had created; compared the man in his daily life and ideals as she now knew them with the narrow monarchical judgment which branded him simply as a usurper and a demagogue. Tzardom she had accepted very much as she had accepted the Bible. Both, it seemed to her, were fundamentals. The atheist was by the very fact of his existence a debased creature; the anarchist, vermin of a

different race to human beings; the republican or anti-monarchist of any type, a person outside argument or consideration. Monarchy was God's system of government. Any other form was a species of blasphemy. It was really after all a somewhat clarified vision of the point of view once held by fifty million peasants. Samara, in the days of her earlier acquaintance with him, she had looked upon with a certain toleration, simply from the fact that she regarded him as one of the milestones on the way from the ruin of her country to its regeneration, to be disregarded ruthlessly enough when the whole light of sanity once more returned to the people. The ethics of his system of government she had never even considered. She had marvelled at its results, but all the time with the feeling that the same and better results would have been attained under monarchical rule. She had never even doubted that if the longed for day of reëstablishment should come, she would marry Nicholas and reign over Russia. She scarcely doubted that even now, although for once their wills had crossed.

Yet, in these days, she found herself comparing the two men. She found herself asking, in the spirit of a new-born heresy, whether Nicholas indeed possessed a single one of Samara's gifts, whether indeed it were possible for him, ruling by divine grace, to attain similar results to those which Samara's genius had achieved. In those days of disquiet after her few hours of daily work at Government Buildings, necessarily restricted, owing to Samara's absence, she took to walking the streets in the late afternoon, when twilight offered a sort of shelter — streets now as safe as the thoroughfares of any European capital of the world, thanks to the wonderful system of police. Nearly always her way led her past Government House. One evening, to her

surprise, she found a crowd collected in the street — a patient crowd, watching a thin thread of light through the curtained windows of a room on the lower floor. She paused for a moment and listened, gathering from the whispers that Samara had returned. In front of the door stood a high-powered motor car. She retreated a little from the throng and passed into a side street, unlocked a postern door in the wall with a key which she carried always with her, and made her way up the narrow strip of artificial garden to the back of the house. A manservant admitted her without question, and she hastened towards Samara's room on the ground floor. Ivan stood on duty outside the door.

"One may enter?" she enquired.

Ivan shook his head.

"General Trotsk is within," he replied, "and Minister Argoff. There is to be no interruption."

Catherine fetched herself a chair and sat down. The conference was obviously of a disturbed nature. Often she heard Argoff's voice raised almost to passion, and more than once the cold anger which burned at the back of Trotsk's measured words filled them with unusual and ominous volume. Samara's voice, alone, seemed unchanged, but sometimes in his intonation she detected a sign of the strain from which he must be suffering. At last came silence — then the throwing open of the door. The Minister of Police and Argoff came out together. The former glanced steadily at Catherine, saluted, hesitated and passed on. Ivan stood on one side and she crossed the threshold. As the door was closed behind her, she stopped short. Samara's head was buried in his hands. Instinctively she felt like an intruder, and hesitated, wondering whether she could withdraw unheard. Samara, however, with his amazing sensibility, seemed to be suddenly conscious of her pres-

ence. The flutter of her skirt, a waft of perfume from the bunch of dying violets she wore, or perhaps the sound of her quick indrawn breath, warned him of her coming. He looked up, rose an inch or two from his chair and nodded in friendly fashion.

"The light tires my eyes," he said, as though in explanation of his posture. "How did you know that I was here?"

"By the people outside, not from you," she replied a little reproachfully.

"I nearly sent for you," he admitted, "just to indulge in the very weakness of sharing my woes."

"The Peace Conference, I am told, is postponed," she said. "Why is Andrew not back from London?"

The question seemed to perplex him.

"I wish I knew," he admitted. "I cabled him to return. For ten days I have had no word from him. He is perhaps ill."

"It is I who have robbed you of the one person who should have been by your side," she exclaimed remorsefully.

He shook his head.

"I am not sure whether Andrew would be any comfort to me if he were here," he confided. "He behaved most strangely before he left and he never sympathised with my demobilisation schemes. I rather fancy that he would go over to the great majority and side against me."

He sat quite still for a moment, as though deliberating. Catherine, venturing to watch him a little more closely, was shocked at the change in his appearance. There were hollows underneath those always somewhat high cheek bones. His mouth, in its straight firm lines, seemed to have lost the possibility of any tenderness or humour. His eyes had surely receded a little and hard-

ened. The wistful gleam of the visionary was still lurking in their depths, but the light of hope seemed to have grown weak.

" This room is insufferable," he declared wearily. " I dare not open the windows because of the people. Come up to the top. I have a fancy to talk with you there."

She followed him from the room by a door opening out of the alcove, along a narrow passage and into the self-adjusting lift, then up the final flights of stairs, on to the leaded parapets. From the recess to which he presently led her the whole of the city westwards was visible, enclosed in an arc of lights, with a glimpse beyond of the great plain rolling and falling to an indefinable horizon. The new city was tangled with the old, high buildings and straight-hewn streets cleaving their way through the jumble of ancient tenements, decayed mansions, half palaces, half hovels, the churches with their strangely shaped roofs and towers, the gimcrack lodging houses of Soviet erection. In the half light one seemed to be able to visualise the eternal struggle between modernity and antiquity; the utilitarian triumphing, magnificent in victory, here and there an old street or square left only partially destroyed, lending a touch of beauty to the stern and intruding materialism of brick and iron. Samara laid his hand upon Catherine's sleeve, his other arm outflung to where the canopy of lights ended.

" This has been my hardest task," he said, " and this has become the city I love. When they asked me to do what I could for Russia there was scarcely a light to be seen from here, scarcely a sound building. The streets were full of holes and ruts, the sewers were open, no man or woman could walk safely for a hundred yards in any direction. There was scarcely a shop doing business, prices were ridiculous, people died of starvation in the

street. And to-day, see! Even this below is only the birth of a great city, but it grows hour by hour. The stores are full, prices are normal. Look at that blaze of light westward. Those are factories working overtime on American contracts."

"Russia will never forget what you have done for her," she assured him softly.

"History may remind her in the future," he answered. "Your passer-by in the streets below to-night has forgotten. Strange things are happening hour by hour. Marshall Phildivia, Commander in Chief of the Russian armies, received instructions to report here to-day. He failed to do so. They tell me that after receiving the mandate he flew instead to Odensk. Trotsk, my one really strong man, has asked to-night for permission to resign his position."

"I do not understand," she confessed. "Are you preparing to abdicate without even a fight?"

"A fight!" he repeated. "I have been fighting every minute of every day for the last three weeks. I shall fight to the end, but concerning one thing I have sworn an oath in heaven, and no one shall make me perjure myself. Enough blood has been shed in Russia. What there is left is best preserved. I shall resist monarchy with the last breath of my body, but not a single Russian soldier shall lose his life for or against me."

"It is a wonderful decision," she murmured. "What about the First Army, then?"

"It is because of the First Army that Trotsk deserts me," he replied. "I will not have them mobilised. I will not have them fight against their fellows. While I live, Russia shall not fight Russia."

"But surely you need a certain measure of defence," she protested. "May I be quite frank?"

"Naturally," he answered.

"From what I can learn," she went on, "I think that your mission to Odensk has been more or less a failure. What you can demonstrate to a logician you cannot hammer into the head of a Russian peasant. I have read some of your speeches. They are wonderful. They have almost convinced me — a Royalist from the cradle. They are utterly wasted upon the men of the Second Army to whom you have addressed them."

"I believe you are right," he admitted gloomily. "Yet, what does it matter? It is not the Second Army which will decide this problem. It is the whole electorate. Trotsk wants to mobilise the First Army and bring them across the river to the city. Why should I? The danger from Odensk is less than they have any idea of. Only you and I know that secret. But if it were greater, I would never see army against army. The people of Russia shall judge between what I have done and what Nicholas Imanoff may promise them."

"You are a Quixote amongst rulers," she exclaimed. "The First Army is still yours, uncorrupted and patriotic. With their help you could hold your own against anything the others could do. Why do you hesitate? It is without a doubt your best chance."

"If it were my only one," he answered, "I should not change. The people shall decide."

"There is something tragical about it all," she sighed. "You do not mind if I continue to speak frankly?"

"Mind? Go on, please."

"If it were left to the class you despise most — the *bourgeoisie* — there would be no doubt of the result. These are the people who read a little and think a little, who study foreign politics and realise the amazing change in their own country. You are sure of them. Their vote is yours to a man. It is the peasants whom

you love — the peasants to whom you have spoken as a father to his children — who are the doubtful quantity. They are superstitious, at heart deeply religious, but very, very narrow; very prone to rely upon a passing feeling."

"I know them," he admitted. "I must confess that they are the doubtful quantity. I am still content to leave the issue to their judgment."

"So you have announced," Catherine said. "But has it ever struck you that it may not suit the other side to wait? The electorate is, after all, unreliable. If they believed that it was in their power to seize Moscow without the possibility of any resistance, don't you think that they would do so?"

"There is no chance of that," he answered. "You and I best know why."

"Supposing the corps commanders should refuse to destroy the ammunition dumps?" she persisted.

"They will not refuse," he assured her. "They are all my men. You must not imagine either that it will be a matter of hours. It will be a matter of seconds — the turning of a single prepared switch."

"Supposing the Royalists should get to know your plans and save the ammunition?"

"It would have to be a very wonderful betrayal," he observed. "The secret is known to exactly three people in the world — yourself, myself and Andrew. Problem — find the traitor!"

"I am on the side of the Royalists," she reminded him. "It is absurdly rash of you to trust me with such a secret!"

"You might fight," he answered, "if you were a man. You would never betray."

For some reason unintelligible to either of them, they both relapsed into a curiously prolonged silence. Sa-

mara, a few feet back from the edge of the parapet, was leaning against a great block of masonry, his arms folded, his eyes fixed first upon the dark pall of clouds which had suddenly risen up on the horizon, but later on Catherine, whose face was a little turned from him. She stood on the extreme edge of the parapet, the upper part of her figure outlined against the black chasm of sky and space; a curiously effective background. She was like a pastel in real life, something fine in line and exquisite in conception, but amazingly human. She looked into the empty places, but without the air of a visionary. There were human thoughts which throbbed in her brain; human passions which stirred in her veins. Life, which since her departure from New York had moved so swiftly for her, seemed all the time to be piling up problems which even at that moment filled her mind — problems which she faced without a touch of neurotic disability but with a simplicity and breadth of vision essentially racial. Even her smooth and beautiful forehead was unruffled as she studied the issues which had risen up before her. Samara, watching more and more intently, was puzzled. He remembered ever afterwards that in these, his hours of fate, the most strenuous effort of his mind was directed towards a wistful, intense desire to read the thoughts of one who certainly might have been counted outside the cycle of his fate.

The breaking of the storm disturbed them. The whole of the black curtain of clouds seemed suddenly to open and disclose a background of fire. For a moment the light on her face appeared to him almost unearthly. Then she turned towards him with a very human little exclamation.

"Come along down," she cried. "The rain will be here in a moment."

The end of her words was lost in the crash of thunder which seemed to shake the building around them. She grasped his arm. He held her tightly and for a moment he did not move.

"An allegory," he whispered. "I came to look out upon this city because its splendour is mine. I made it, brought it into being. All this is nothing to the meeting of the clouds. To-morrow the sun will shine down again on my work."

Suddenly he felt the cling of her arms, the touch of her body against his. A spell of forgetfulness swept him off his feet as his lips were pressed to hers. There was a moment of deep, intense silence, then the blaze of light again all around them. She broke away, with a perfectly human, unembarrassed laugh, though underneath was a curious new undertone.

"Another second," she warned him, "and all Moscow would have seen us. Perhaps they did, as it is. Come!"

She ran with flying footsteps across the leads, down the iron ladder and along the passage. He was breathless when he rejoined her in the great wainscotted library. The telephone bell on his desk was ringing without intermission. She pointed to it silently. He took off the receiver, listened for a time, spoke again and hung it up. Then he turned to Catherine.

"The Cabinet are holding a private session at Government Buildings," he explained. "They have heard that I am back from Odensk and they have done me the courtesy to desire my presence. I must go there at once. Except for Trotsk, Argoff assures me that they are perfectly sound."

"Have they to seek election?" she enquired.

"Only by the Duma," he answered. "They are in office until Parliament reassembles."

"Are you coming back here afterwards?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"This must be good night," he told her. "I am addressing the officers at Odensk to-morrow morning and I shall fly back as soon as the storm is over. Before I go, I want to ask you one question."

"Well?"

"What were you thinking of to-night when the thunder crashed down upon us?"

She smiled reminiscently.

"Of you," she admitted. "I will tell you what I was thinking. I was remembering first of all a saying of Voltaire's that 'Every great man in the world at some time or another makes one huge mistake.' Do you know what yours is?"

"No."

"You have despised women. You have been too proud to share yourself, to live anywhere else except in the unalterable ego. You have classed women with flowers and wine and sunshine — a great mistake, Gabriel Samara!"

"There are not many women like you," he said, after a moment's pause.

"That is part of your folly," she insisted. "A woman is what her own love makes her, or the love of the man she loves. You know what yours would have made of any woman whom you had taken into your life? It would have made her practical, far-seeing. She would have supplied just that leaven of common sense, of human outlook, which would have kept your feet on the ground. You have kept your head turned to the skies just one hour too long. The woman would have pointed across the plain. You could have had this, Gabriel Samara, and the wine, and the sunshine, and the flowers."

He shook his head a little sadly.

"You may be right," he confessed, "but if you are, salvation would still have been impossible for me."

She smiled across at him delightfully.

"I am too much of a woman to refuse the compliment," she murmured.

At the door, he turned back. He pointed to the safe with its marvellous array of bars and cross-bars.

"I have never asked you for an assurance before," he said, "but I ask you now — will you hold that secret for me for forty-eight hours?"

"I promise," she answered readily.

CHAPTER XII

CATHERINE, on her homeward way that night, paused at the corner of the Square, astounded. Streets and pavement alike were closely packed with a surging crowd, many of them, as she saw at once, students from the universities, but the great majority of the working class. They waited very patiently, almost in silence, always gazing at the upper windows of her aunt's house. Even whilst she lingered there for a moment, the windows leading out on to the balcony were opened and Nicholas, not for the first time, she gathered, made his appearance. With a little catch of the breath, she noticed that he was wearing the old uniform of the Imperial Army. The people realised it too, and there was a low, hoarse murmur of restrained applause. Nicholas stood at the salute. The applause swelled and grew, but only one or two amongst the crowd were venturesome enough to dare the spoken word.

"Long live Nicholas Imanoff, Tzar of Russia!" some one cried shrilly from the centre of the throng.

The applause increased still further to a roar. Catherine turned to one of the great policemen who was standing, placid, by her side.

"Is this allowed?" she enquired.

"All this is permitted, lady," was the respectful reply. "Save the anarchists, every one in the city has the right of free speech. An edict confirming this has just been issued from the Home Office, signed by Samara himself."

"Do you think I could get to my home?" she asked.

"Where is it that you wish to go?"

"To the house where Nicholas Imanoff is standing upon the balcony."

"You are a member of the household?"

"I am his cousin, Catherine Zygoff of Urulsk."

"In that case, gracious lady," the policeman assured her, "a way shall be made."

He held his baton above his head and shouted in strident Russian at the top of his voice.

"Way for the Princess Catherine Zygoff of Urulsk, who seeks to return to the house of the Grand Duchess. Give way for the gracious Princess! Give way, you loiterers!"

The spirit of orderliness was in the crowd, perhaps because it was so seldom questioned. A lane was made for Catherine at once. People in the background stood on tiptoe to see her. From the heart of the assembly came the same shrill voice.

"Way for the Princess Catherine Zygoff of Urulsk, cousin of Nicholas Imanoff, future Tzarina of Russia."

There was a moment's breathless pause. Liberty of speech was a new gift to Russia and something of the old dread lingered. In a few seconds, however, hesitation vanished. Catherine regained her roof through an avenue of wildly applauding, hat-waving youths. She passed into the house without a sign. At the top of the stairs Nicholas met her, his face flushed.

"Come and stand by my side, Catherine," he invited. "The people demand it. It is our betrothal."

"Do not be absurd," she answered scornfully. "What are these but a few handfuls of sight-seers, out for any sensation they can get hold of. There are just as many yelling themselves hoarse at Samara's gates. One loses dignity in accepting such tribute."

The young man's eyes flashed with anger.

"It is from the small beginnings that the great things

come," he cried. "These people have sought me out of their own will. You have not heard. We bring news from Odensk. There have been demonstrations at Petrograd. The country is with us!"

"It will be quite time enough for us to accept the homage of the people," Catherine insisted, "when the elections have convinced us that it is the people's will that we should be restored to our proper places."

"You talk like Samara himself," he sneered. "Have you no Russian blood in your veins?"

"Catherine!"

The suddenness of the interruption startled her into momentary silence. Alexandrina had pushed her way past Nicholas and stood below him upon the stairs. She was like a woman transformed. The disabilities of her figure seemed to have vanished. It was the voice of a great lady who spoke.

"You have forgotten what is due to your cousin and to your destiny, Catherine," she said. "These are the first of the millions who will yet claim you. Do not hesitate for another moment. Let these people see you standing by Nicholas' side. All Russia will hear of it and know."

Catherine was torn with a terrible indetermination. Nicholas made room for her to pass and followed her as she slowly ascended the stairs. She was in a state of furious revolt, but she had somehow the feeling that she was obeying an immutable law. They entered the salon and moved towards the wide-flung window.

"This is no small matter, Catherine," Nicholas exclaimed eagerly. "We bring wonderful news. People are flocking here from all parts of the city. There are students there, too — the class we want. Smile at them and at me, Catherine. This is the beginning of the greater days."

She took her place beside him on the balcony and looked downwards into the upturned faces. Once more hats were waved; a roar of voices seemed to come to her from an indefinite space. She felt her hand grasped tightly by Nicholas, and the volume of applause suddenly increased. Her fingers were limp and passive and cold. She seemed to remember that earlier in the evening she had stood in a windier paradise and on a greater height.

Dinner that night at Alexandrina's flat was a disturbed and tumultuous meal. Nicholas was full of his personal triumphs at Odensk. Even though he had been compelled to appear there as a civilian, the common soldiers had broken all rules of discipline and saluted him. The meetings which Kirdorff had arranged had been packed, the enthusiasm enormous. The excitement seemed somehow to have benefited Nicholas, to have raised for a few moments his feet from the ground. He was vainglorious, but confident.

"I have promised the people," he announced, "a government which shall give them as much liberty as the present one — liberty of speech and liberty of religion. I have promised them to alter nothing which is for their good. In return, they will know that they are being governed, not by a usurper, but by divine and moral right."

"You are becoming amazingly eloquent, dear cousin," Catherine murmured. "To tell you the truth," she went on, "your eagerness for my presence to-night astonished me. I had fancied, from our last parting, that I was written out of your scheme of things."

"That could not be," Nicholas replied solemnly. "It could not be in the first place because our alliance is the one thing necessary to make our position sure in

the face of the Russian people. You and I represent all that is left of our great House."

"The union," Alexandrina declared, "has been blessed in heaven and sanctioned by the Head of our Church. It is one of the great and happy features of the new day."

"As for our last parting," Nicholas concluded, "I remember very well my anger. That, however, is finished. We ask no further service of you, Catherine. To-night we start afresh."

Catherine looked at him reflectively. A vague sense of trouble was gathering in her mind. To cross-question him further at present, however, was impossible. They had finished dinner now and moved into the small salon, where all the time a little stream of callers presented themselves and, having paid their respects, passed on to make room for others. Nicholas accepted the homage paid him readily and with dignity. Catherine was gracious but noncommittal.

"We move too fast," she insisted more than once. "Later, perhaps."

She sought her opportunity for speech with her cousin. Towards the end of the evening it came.

"Nicholas," she said, "I must ask you what you meant when you assured me that you would cease your attempts to persuade me to betray Samara's confidence? You know that I have in my keeping a secret. When you left the house that evening you were very angry because I refused to divulge it."

He smiled at her in condescending fashion.

"Put the matter behind you, my dear Catherine," he begged. "It is finished. The world itself is opening before us. All that we seek to learn we shall learn, and that without delay."

He moved away to greet some fresh arrivals. The

cloud of uneasiness in Catherine's mind increased. She was seized with a very definite and persistent apprehension. As soon as it was possible she slipped unnoticed from the room and made her way to her own apartment.

There were still people in the Square when, at a few minutes after midnight, Catherine left the house by the back entrance and turned towards Government House. She had changed her gown for a plain walking costume of dark material, and she wore a small hat with a thick veil. There was something hard and comforting in her pocket and the thrill of adventure in her pulses. The back streets through which she passed were almost deserted, but in the broader thoroughfares the lights were still flaming and people were promenading in such numbers that the tread of their feet sounded like the march of a distant army. Samara's boast, however, that the streets of Moscow were now as safe as the streets of New York and London was justified in her person that night. Except for a few good-humoured greetings she passed on her way unnoticed until she reached the side entrance to Government House. She entered by the postern door, closed it behind her noiselessly, and stood for a moment peering into the shadows of the courtyard. There was no one stirring, no sound of following footsteps from the street outside. Yet, for the first time, Catherine was unaccountably nervous. She moved forward reluctantly. She paused at every other step to listen. There were two tall elm trees on her left through which the wind seemed to pass with a sort of shuddering sigh, sending pattering down upon her drops of rain from the recent storm. The house itself presented a great white blank, the blinds drawn and the shutters tightly fastened. She approached nearer and nearer to it, climbed the steps and stopped once more to listen. The silence was still unbroken, save for the dull rever-

beration of those ceaseless footsteps in the distance, the sharp honk of a motor horn on the boulevard, an occasional murmur of voices. She entered the house, shut the door behind her, groped her way for a few steps into the gulf of darkness, and found the switch. The great hall was flooded at once with light — an instantaneous though unaccountable relief to her. She passed on and opened the door of the anteroom, itself furnished as a library, at the further end of which lay the entrance to the room she sought. One light only was burning here from the ceiling; so inadequate an illumination of the lofty chamber that she could scarcely see across it. By degrees, as her eyes became accustomed to the gloom, she could dimly discern the great table round which the counsellors had been used to sit, the plain wood panels reaching to the ceiling, with here and there fragments of the ancient tapestry, and, most reassuring sight of all, at the end of the room, seated on guard before the closed door of his master's private apartment, Ivan. She recognised him with a throb of relief and moved at once towards him.

"Ivan!" she cried.

He took no notice. He was bending a little forward, motionless and apparently asleep.

"Ivan!" she called again.

Still he did not reply. She stretched out her hand and gripped him by the shoulder. Her fingers fell upon something hard and as she leaned over him she saw the horror in his distorted face. Her lips parted. It was the effort of her life to keep back the shriek which rose to her lips. In Ivan's back was a dagger. There were some faint drops of blood upon his coat. His face was the face of a dead man and from underneath the chink of the door in front of her, she could distinguish a pale shaft of light.

CHAPTER XIII

The first shivering moments of panic were past and Catherine was comparatively calm, almost collected. In her right hand she held the small revolver which Samara had given her on the steamer; with her left she turned the handle of the door and entered the room. She entered so softly that the man busied with the safe, his back turned towards her, proceeded with his task undisturbed. She drew a little nearer. Then surprise forced from her the exclamation which terror had failed to wring from her lips.

"Andrew!" she cried. "Andrew Kroupki!"

He turned round quite slowly; stiffly, as though it were against his will. The change in him was so startling that she almost wondered that she had recognised him. His face had grown lanker and thinner than ever, his mouth seemed to have taken to itself the character of a wolf's, his sunken eyes seemed at once to have lost expression and yet have gained in brilliancy. With a little thrill of horror she saw the scar upon his cheek. He drew himself gradually upright.

"Catherine Borans!" he muttered. "What do you want?"

"When did you come back from England?" she asked.

"I did not go to England," he answered. "Samara thought that I was there. He was wrong. I went to Odensk."

"Odensk!" she repeated incredulously.

"Yes. You haven't heard, then? But how would you? I swore them to secrecy. I have betrayed Samara. I am selling his secrets to your friends, the

Royalists — selling them day by day. They tell me you have some foolish scruples. So they sent me here for the great one. Scruples! I have none, but I thank the Father of Russia that you came to-night."

"Why?"

He struck himself on the side of the head. He had the appearance of a madman.

"Because my mind is going," he groaned. "My memory is failing. I remembered the hiding place of the key. I remembered the adjustment of the bars — four panels to the left, three to the right, two back — I remembered it all as well as ever — the combination for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday — I know them by heart. To-day is Friday, and I have forgotten. Here I stand, with those proclamations only a few inches off, the secret orders I have promised there within my grasp — and I have forgotten. It is well you came. Tell it me quickly. The password for Friday? My head is hot with the emptiness of it. Quick!"

"To whom are those secret orders going when you have them?" she asked.

"To your friends, the enemies of Samara. Quick!"

She made no movement.

"What has Gabriel Samara done to you," she demanded, "that you should betray him like this?"

"Robbed me," he shouted fiercely. "Robbed me of you!"

"You poor fool!" she scoffed. "Do you know who I am?"

"Catharine Borans," he answered. "The Chief brought you from New York. But they tell me that you are a Russian — a Monarchist. Well, I am a Monarchist too. Damn Samara!"

"They might have told you the truth," she said.

"It really doesn't matter. I am the Princess Catherine Zygoff of Urulsk, betrothed — if I carry out my contract — to Nicholas of Russia, whom you say you serve."

He glared at her, speechless for several moments.

"Now I know that I am mad," he muttered at last. "A Princess of the Royal House! You were in the Weltmore Typewriting Agency!"

"Quite true," she admitted. "So was Nicholas selling bonds on commission. Kirdorff was secretary to a foreigners' club. My aunt, the Grand Duchess, designed artificial flowers. It is none the less true that we are what we are."

He sank into Samara's chair. For a few moments he seemed to have forgotten his mission.

"Did Samara know?" he gasped.

"He knew at Monte Carlo," she answered. "General von Hartsen told him."

He sat at the table perfectly limp. Something in his attitude reminded her with a little thrill of renewed horror of the man outside.

"Now that you know who I am," she continued quietly, "you know that I have a right to speak on the matter of those papers. You and I are the only two whom Samara has trusted. Royalist though I am, I have no mind to betray him. Neither shall you. Close up the safe, Andrew Kroupki. Go home and ask your God to pardon you for the terrible thing you have done to-night, and the terrible purpose that was in your mind."

He stiffened slightly in his place. Something from which she shrank came into his expression.

"I have finished with Samara," he announced. "He is only a woman. He has not the courage to fight for the people. He is a coward."

"Samara is a great man and you are a liar," she answered.

The fury was back in his face.

"It was always true what I feared," he went on. "You love him. You cannot deny it. In your heart — even though Nicholas takes you to his throne — you are Samara's woman."

"You are becoming a little absurd," she said quietly, struggling against what seemed to be a shortness of breath. "Do as I directed. Leave this room and go home."

He rose from his chair and began moving slowly round the table which separated them.

"No," he decided, "I shall not do that. I shall fulfill the purpose for which I came. Tell me the password for Friday, Catherine Borans."

"I shall never tell it to you," she retorted with determination.

He was clear of the table now, within a dozen yards of her.

"You shall tell me the password," he insisted, his voice rising, "and you shall do other things that I bid you. I have lost my soul since I bore the shame of a woman's blow. There is a little left in life and I will take it. First tell me the password."

Her hand came from the folds of her dress. The feeble light shone on the bright metal of the revolver she held out.

"I shall tell you nothing," she warned him, "and I will not have you a step nearer."

He laughed.

"Those who are sold to the devil," he cried, "have no fear of hell!"

She would have aimed at his mouth but a chance word of advice of Samara's, never to aim too high, came

into her mind. She dropped her arm a few inches and fired. Within the four walls of the room the report seemed to her tremendous — almost deafening. He came on another couple of paces, undeterred. Her finger was on the trigger again, when he suddenly faltered and spun round. He clutched at the air, grasping as though for something to seize hold of, and fell a crumpled heap upon the floor. Catherine stood for a moment looking at him. She watched the slight colour drain from his cheeks, saw the little hole just underneath his shoulder from which a dark spot of blood was oozing. She felt no pity for him; only a great and wonderful relief. If by any chance she had missed! The thought was paralysing in its horror! She retraced her steps for a minute to the door and stood listening. The domestic part of the establishment was some distance away and no one apparently had been disturbed by the report of her revolver. Ivan was still there, terrible in his limp inertness. Again she retraced her steps, made her way to the front of the safe, laid her revolver down upon the table and began the task of securing the intricate fastenings. Once she paused and listened. She fancied that there had been some movement in the room. There was nothing to be heard, however, except the muffled and distant sounds from the street. The safe itself was a miracle of ingenuity, the work of one of Russia's foremost engineers, and familiar though she was with its mechanism, it still absorbed her whole attention. Her task was approaching completion. There was only one more bar to coax into its place. Then the horror came again. She felt her heart almost cease to beat. There was a hot breath upon her cheek. She turned around fearfully, and this time she shrieked as one who looks into hell. It was Andrew's face, white and drawn with pain and passion — Andrew who had

dragged himself to his feet and found strength in his madness.

"Nothing but a flesh wound," he muttered. "I'll have the password from you, and then — the password first. Tell it to me!"

She struck at him with all her force, and for a moment it seemed as though her blow had gone home, for he reeled upon his feet and his new-found strength appeared to have left him. With a fierce effort, however, he recovered himself. His fingers were upon her throat. His knee pinned her to the safe door.

"The password! The password first!"

She put forth all the strength of her youth and supple limbs, and suddenly realised that it was hopeless. His fingers were like burning pincers; his arm like a band of iron. Already the room seemed to be going round, the light must have been extinguished. Then there was another sound — a roar at first, a whisper, a roar again. Where had she heard it before, she wondered with the last efforts of her ebbing consciousness? The steamer! Samara with the would-be assassin in his grasp! The body hurtling through the air! Then she opened her eyes and tried to smile. She was filled with an ineffable sense of relief. The arms which were holding her so firmly and yet so tenderly were Samara's.

CHAPTER XIV

There followed days during which Moscow scarcely knew itself; days of excitement and processions, rumours and counter rumours, meetings in every public hall, at every street corner; telegrams and wireless messages in the plate-glass windows and in nearly every one of the great shops. Curiously enough, all the time business went on almost as usual. The restaurants and cafés were packed with surging crowds, who thronged the boulevards at night singing patriotic songs. Sometimes the crowds were thickest outside Government House, sometimes outside Alexandrina's modest abode. Everywhere people were asking themselves what it all meant. Was it a military rising of the Royalists? If so, why was Nicholas Imanoff, in civilian clothes, to be seen day by day on the balcony of his aunt's house, alighting at the aerodrome on hurried visits from Odensk, driving in an automobile through the streets?

Then Samara addressed two great meetings, one at the Skating Rink, and another at the Opera House, and on the following morning the city awoke to find a proclamation signed by him on every wall. At last they began to understand. It was theirs to make the choice; the restoration of the monarchy under Nicholas Imanoff, or the continuation of the republic under Samara and his Council. The people should decide, Samara promised with persistent passion. No portion of the army should be used even to defend the city against any possible military coup. No blow should be struck, no blood be shed. Samara's invocation to the Russian people was:

CHOOSE WHO SHALL GOVERN YOU

As the days passed on, Catherine became conscious of a sense of growing excitement in her aunt's disturbed household. Kirdorff, Orenburg and most of the younger men of the party were now absent. Finally Nicholas himself departed. The air was filled with rumours. It was the quiet before the storm. In two days the initial electioneering results would be proclaimed. Catherine, who for the first time in anybody's recollection had been confined to her room with a bad throat, came down late one afternoon, with a red rose in her waistband, and a great bundle of papers under her arm. She passed smiling amongst the little groups of her aunt's visitors. She wore an unusual band of velvet around her neck, but seemed otherwise very much as usual. Only the immediate members of the household who had not retired on the night when she had been brought home by Samara's physician in his own car had any idea that she had been suffering from anything but an ordinary indisposition.

"So after all," she remarked, "this great Samara will keep his word. It seems too amazing to think of a change like this without a gun being fired or a blow struck."

An octogenarian baron, once the owner of vast estates in Southern Russia, and now a pensioner at Monaco, took snuff and grunted.

"You forget, Princess," he reminded her, "there may be no change at all. Samara may prove to have been too clever for us. If I had been Kirdorff and the others, I would have let Samara talk of peace and then asked him to look down the barrels of a hundred thousand rifles from Odensk."

"The Baron is right," a woman from the other end

of the room declared eagerly. "The whole of the army at Odensk is almost in a state of mutiny at the idea of demobilisation. Nicholas has made no compact with Samara. He could march into Moscow at the head of a quarter of a million of soldiers in two days, and the victory would be won."

The Grand Duchess smiled. She looked across at Catherine and smiled again.

"One never knows," she murmured.

But Nicholas had not the chance of marching into Moscow at the head of even a hundred thousand soldiers. He arrived instead, very sulky and wet, about half-past eleven that night, soon after the last of the guests had departed. His anger blazed up at the sight of Catherine.

"It is you whom we have to thank for this failure," he exclaimed furiously. "You and that lunatic, Andrew Kroupki, who seems to have tumbled off the edge of the earth."

"What has happened?" his aunt cried. "All day long we have been listening for the rumbling of the trains and the sound of your guns."

"Guns!" he scoffed. "Samara's secret was simple enough. It has paralysed the entire army. Yesterday the whole of the ammunition within five hundred miles of us was destroyed, and the men's bayonets seized. There is an army still, it is true — armed with walking sticks!"

"Samara has at least been consistent," Catherine pointed out. "He fights harder to avoid bloodshed than for his own cause. Do you realise that if he chose to, he could bring the First Army into the city, fully armed and equipped?"

Nicholas sprawled in an easy-chair and drank brandy.

"How could he?" he asked cynically. "After his

declaration of pacifism? We could show fight — not he."

"My opinion of you and your counsellors is that you are a brainless lot," she retorted. "You have lost a magnificent opportunity of impressing Moscow and the whole world."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Simply this. You say that practically the whole of the Second Army are on your side."

"Except for a percentage of the officers, they are."

"You have your hundred trains waiting and your commissariat," she continued. "Why don't you bring your soldiers up unarmed? You can issue a proclamation and say that, agreeing with Samara in his great desire that not a single life should be lost, you are content to show by peaceful illustration the will of the army."

Nicholas looked across at her for a moment blankly and afterwards in almost fervent admiration. Then he rose to his feet.

"I'm going to the telephone," he declared. "You are a genius, Catherine!"

Catherine herself waited until the small hours of the morning. Then she stole downstairs to the room on the ground floor where the telephone was, and asked for that secret number which only she and a few others knew. Almost immediately Samara answered her.

"You should be in bed," she told him severely.

"One does not sleep these days," he answered. "You are better?"

"Absolutely," she assured him. "What about Andrew?" she added, after a moment's hesitation.

"He died in hospital this morning," was the cool reply. "I only wish that he had died in New York twelve months ago."

"I have news for you," Catherine confided.

"Well?"

"The Second Army are going to march on Moscow just the same, but as pacifists. They are coming to protest against being demobilised and to shout themselves hoarse for Nicholas. My idea entirely."

"A very excellent one," Samara admitted after a moment's pause, "but I'll counteract it. Some busybody has mobilised the First Army against my orders. I'll disarm them and bring them in also."

"I gather that Moscow will be becoming lively during the next few days," she remarked. "How do you think things are going?"

"In the direction of change," he answered a little sadly. "It is always like that. The pendulum of political impulses will never cease to swing. Are you to be crowned in Moscow?"

"It has been suggested," she assented. "Shall I send you a card?"

"I shall escape from your magnificence," he declared. "There is that little villa down in the South of France which I showed you on our way back from America. I fixed upon it then as my ultimate retreat. I scarcely thought, though, that it would be so soon."

"Nothing is settled yet," she reminded him. "You may win at the polls. If you do, there is only one way to avoid trouble in the future. Send Nicholas back to New York to sell bonds and my aunt with him to make her artificial roses."

"And you?"

"Back to the Weltmore Typewriting Agency. I am sure they'd take me. It was such a good advertisement for them when I left New York with you."

"Are you by any chance being flippant?" he asked.

"No, I'm just sleepy," she confided. "Good night!"

CHAPTER XV

Two days later a new sensation presented itself to the already distracted inhabitants of Moscow. Soon after dawn from every railway terminus and even along some of the main thoroughfares outside, columns of soldiers in blue-grey uniform came creeping into the city. By noon it was estimated that there were nearly a hundred thousand from the Second Army alone encamped in the streets and squares. To add to the bewilderment of the people, from northwards came a steady stream of soldiers from the First Army, also unarmed. The streets were hung with a proclamation:

A portion of the Second Army will arrive in Moscow to-day to protest against demobilisation. Anxious in every way to show my accord with the desire of your President to avoid bloodshed, the troops at my advice will come unarmed.

(*Signed*) NICHOLAS.

Samara showed his first signs of anger when a copy of this proclamation was brought to him. He tore it promptly in two and flung the pieces across the table.

"It is untrue," he told the little conclave of ministers who were with him in almost hourly consultation. "If a woman had not been faithful, Nicholas would have made a shambles of the city. As it is, under whose orders do these troops march? Where is General Denkers?"

It was a Cabinet Meeting but there were many vacancies down the long table. Argoff leaned forward in his place.

"The General telephoned half an hour ago to say that he would call at Government House on his way into the city," he announced.

"If he is here, admit him," Samara directed shortly.

Argoff left the Council Chamber and returned a few moments later ushering in the Commander in Chief of the Second Army — General Denkers. The latter saluted gravely and stood with his hands resting lightly on the back of the chair to which Samara pointed.

"By whose orders, General, have you brought these troops to Moscow?" Samara demanded.

"I have to report, sir," was the momentous reply, "that in common with a large majority of the officers under my command, I, two nights ago, took the oath of allegiance to Nicholas Imanoff, future Tzar of Russia."

"Are you not anticipating a little, General?" Samara enquired imperturbably. "It is true that I have issued a proclamation that the constitution of this country shall be according to the desire of the people. The people as yet have not spoken."

"Sir," the General answered, "the army has spoken."

Samara smiled with faint sarcasm.

"And, but for an unexpected shortage of ammunition," he remarked, "I imagine that the army would have spoken in a different tongue. It is perhaps fortunate that my agents advised me of your probable attitude."

The General remained silent. He had been a soldier of Samara's own choosing, a fine disciplinarian, a strong, conscientious man. It was very certain that if he had declared for the Tzar, it was because he had believed in Tzardom.

"Supposing I order the First Army to march upon the city?" Samara suggested. "They are perfectly armed, accoutered, and loyal to the Republic."

"Such a step would be contrary to your own proclamation, sir," General Denkers rejoined quickly. "You have announced your earnest desire to have the future of this country decided upon without the shedding of blood."

"I wonder," Samara asked, looking at him steadily, "whether you would have respected my appeal if the bombs had been there for your aeroplanes, the cartridges for your rifles and machine guns, and the ammunition for your heavy artillery?"

The General made no reply. His silence was in itself a confession.

"You are dismissed, General," Samara concluded. "In the name of the State, I charge you to issue orders to your officers that all property be respected and that any acts of insubordination are immediately punished."

"We shall use our most strenuous efforts in that direction, sir," were the General's final words.

Samara looked down the table. There were eight ministers present; five others, including Trotsk, already deserters.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "the Government of this country is in suspense. Until the new Duma is elected and meets, constitutionally we are impotent. Such measures as must be taken for the good of the country can be left to my associates, Weirtz and Argoff, together with myself. You are dismissed."

The Minister of Finance rose to his feet.

"Sir," he said, "we are passing through one of the strangest upheavals of history. It may be that we shall none of us meet again in this chamber as officials of the Russian Government. Before we part, let me say on my own account, at least, that if we and the rest of the country should yield to the popular desire for a change of constitution, there will still be not one of us

who will not think of you, Mr. President, with the deepest gratitude and respect. You have been a great ruler of this country in troublous times and a patriot in this hour of adversity, as these days of bloodlessness prove. I claim the privilege of shaking hands with you, sir, even though I venture to tell you that if the people's call for a monarchy is, as seems at present, unanimous, I shall tender my services to Nicholas Imanoff."

There was a chorus of assent. Samara shook hands with every one. They filed out a little reluctantly. At the very last moment one of the official secretaries rushed in with a telephonic dispatch.

Samara read it through.

"Gentlemen," he announced, raising his voice a little so that every one might hear, "the result of the elections in twenty-three districts is herewith proclaimed. Twenty-one have voted for the representative pledged to the restoration of the monarchy."

A murmur of amazement, almost of consternation, was clearly audible. Nothing so sweeping as this had been expected. Argoff and Weirtz would have lingered with their Chief, but Samara waved them away.

"It is useless," he said, "to discuss affairs of state. You will find me here if I am wanted."

He retired into his inner chamber — the faithful Ivan no longer there to guard the door — telephoned to the servants outside, denying himself to all callers, and spent several hours looking through his private papers. Once a privileged servant came silently in with the samovar upon a silver tray. He waved him away.

"A bottle of brandy," he ordered.

He helped himself liberally, refilled his glass and sent over to Government Buildings for one or two minor officials with whom he completed some unfinished business. Later on an official from the Home Office pre-

sented himself with another list of election results. The young man handed him the sheet almost apologetically and Samara read it with genuine astonishment. The returns were now in for over half the seats in the Duma, and out of a hundred and thirty districts, a hundred and seven had voted for the monarchist representative.

"What does it mean, Paul Metzger?" Samara asked curiously. "Where did it come from, all this fever for a monarch? Why was there no evidence of it before?"

"There isn't a man in Russia who isn't asking himself the same question, sir," the young official declared. "In the cafés, on the streets, and in the clubs, there is nothing but sheer amazement. All that the most clear-sighted can say is that it is the swing of the pendulum. The army started it, of course, but why the country districts should all be on fire to see the monarchy back again is inexplicable."

"I wonder whether Bromley Pride is still in Moscow?" Samara ruminated.

"He is one of about a hundred waiting in the anteroom, sir," Metzger replied.

"I will see him," Samara announced. "Send the others away."

Pride came lumbering in, as breezy and cheerful as ever. He was too much a man of the world to pull a long face and offer sympathy.

"You've earned immortality, Mr. President," he said, as he shook hands. "I'm just from Berlin. I was at the start of things there. I've seen half a dozen South American republics come and go, although perhaps they don't count any. I'm supposed to be an authority upon revolutions and changes of constitution in a country, but I want to tell you this is the most astounding business I ever knew. No one could conceive of such a thing. There are a hundred thousand unarmed soldiers

in the city, hobnobbing with a hundred thousand civilians; there are gala dinners at all the swagger restaurants, you can't get within a dozen yards of a table at any of the ordinary cafés, and I haven't heard an angry word or seen a blow struck. I was out early this morning. There the crowds were, as patient as you please, waiting for the election returns. I met dozens of people I knew slightly and I asked them all the same question. 'Which is it going to be?' I got the same answer right away from every one of them. 'The elections are to decide,' they said. And I tell you this, Samara," the journalist concluded impressively, "if the country had voted the other way, they'd have taken it all right. Talk about a bloodless revolution! I never believed in such a thing before. I didn't think human nature could stand the strain."

Samara pushed over the bottle of brandy and lit a cigarette.

"Pride," he said, "you are one of the few men in the world whose judgment I would believe in as soon as my own. You are there amongst the people, and you see the truth. What does it all mean? I have governed these people for fifteen years. No country in the history of the world has prospered as Russia has done under my rule. Yet along comes this young scion of the Imanoffs, whom I found selling bonds in New York, shows himself to the people, makes use of a little propaganda in the army, and behold he seems suddenly to have become a god. You have seen the voting?"

Pride nodded.

"When you've learned not to care, Samara," he said, "you'll understand it better. This is at the root of the whole thing. The commonest evil quality in all human nature is ingratitude. It isn't a conscious evil quality. It's the philosophical evolution of the profound

egotism of human nature. The whole country's prosperous and happy and cheerful. The people don't stop to realise that it's your administration which has brought that about. They honestly believe that they have done it all themselves. You've had the privilege of being at the head of the government. They don't grudge it to you. They have no ill-will towards you. They're simply dazzled by the prospect of a more picturesque form of government. It never enters into their heads for a moment that the present prosperity might not continue. They have accepted it as a matter of course. They think it will continue as a matter of course. That's as near as I or any one else can get at an explanation of what is going on to-day. It has nothing to do with you. You made just one mistake and only one."

"Demobilisation," Samara murmured.

Pride signified his assent.

"You will remember I warned you in New York," he continued. "A soldier doesn't look far enough ahead. Your men were well-fed, well looked after, well pensioned. They weren't philosophers. They didn't appreciate the fact that theirs, from your point of view, was an unnatural existence. You tried to pitchfork them out into civil life without preparing them sufficiently for the change. Then arrived that little nest of conspirators you brought back from New York, and the whole thing was easy. You went too fast, Samara. You brought it off with the first million, but you ought to have waited for a year or so afterwards."

Samara nodded and changed the subject almost abruptly.

"What's the last move in the city?" he asked

Pride shrugged his shoulders.

"This is such a kid glove sort of affair," he observed,

" that I should have thought Nicholas Imanoff would have been round here to consult you. There's some talk about a ceremony to-morrow of some description. I heard there were a hundred men working upon the cathedral bells."

Metzger reëntered with the air of one who brings tidings.

" Sir," he announced, " the Archbishop is here and begs to be received."

" You can show his Lordship in at once," Samara directed. " Don't go away, Pride. It's as well there should be some historian of the period present. Sit at the other end there and listen if you wish to."

The Archbishop, followed by a chaplain, was shown in with some formality. He was a large, bulky man, with a black beard, commanding physique, a splendid forehead and piercing eyes. Even in his strangely fashioned vestments he was a person of dignity.

" Mr. President," he said, as Samara rose to receive him, " you will permit me to explain the reason of my visit."

" If your Lordship will be seated," Samara begged.

The Bishop leaned his elbow upon the table and played for a moment with one of his rings.

" You are doubtless in touch, sir," he proceeded, " with the trend of events. I have been asked to-morrow morning to open the cathedral and to administer the sacrament to Nicholas Imanoff and the Princess Catherine of Urulsk, his intended bride."

Samara made no movement. He sat quite still, looking beyond the walls of his room.

" You and I, sir," the Archbishop went on, after a moment's pause, " have had little to do with one another during the years of your office — much sometimes to my regret. From the material point of view, Russia will

never be able to forget what it owes you. You have brought the country out of a state of pitiful misery and filled her veins with new and vigorous health. If it has not seemed good to you, or according to your convictions, to think also of her spiritual welfare, that, alas, in these days, is no uncommon thing. You cannot blame me, however, if, as the head of the Church, I welcome frankly a new régime which incorporates at least the outward observances of the Christian faith with its ceremonies of state."

"I do not blame you, indeed, Archbishop," Samara acknowledged. "From your point of view, this must be a wonderful change. The pageantry of monarchy needs the background of ecclesiastical ceremony."

"Not only the outward form, I trust," the Archbishop ventured earnestly. "The ceremonies of our Church, even that one which will take place to-morrow, are as nothing if they are not symbolic of spiritual things."

Samara bowed.

"Your Lordship has done kindly in coming to visit me," he said. "My work for Russia is over. The new government will bring you a larger sphere of action and greater responsibility. You have my best wishes."

The Archbishop rose to his feet.

"You, sir," he pronounced, "stood shoulder to shoulder with the Church when you struck at the great dragon of atheism, and for that reason I beg you to accept my blessing."

Samara bent his head. For a moment the sonorous voice of the priest seemed to be attuned to some deep note of music. Then his hand flashed back and followed by his chaplain, he was gone. Samara looked after him like a man in a dream.

Presently Pride came up to offer his adieux.

"What are your plans?" he asked.

"I am going abroad at once," Samara confided. "I am going to live in the most beautiful country I know; grow olives and grapes, farm a little, read a little, write a little. After all, I have earned a rest."

"What part of the world do you choose?" Pride enquired.

Samara shook his head.

"When my wine press makes its first revolution," he replied, "and I gather my first crop of olives, you shall know."

CHAPTER XVI

No person had a finer view than Samara himself of the great pageant which transformed Moscow on the following day into a city of amazing beauty and splendour. He stood upon the roof of Government House, leaning against the solid parapet, looking down upon the great thoroughfare below, at the streets beyond, at the great dome of the cathedral above which the bells, silent for many years, were making clamorous music. Every house was decked with flags, every person in the crowded streets seemed to be carrying flowers or waving banners. With a grim smile he watched Trotsk, with an escort of mounted police, pass up towards the cathedral, pushing the people back on either side. They stood eight or nine deep upon the pavement — a solid phalanx; soldiers and civilians mixed together, good-humoured, cheering at everything, festive with the joy of a great holiday. Samara gazed down at them a little wistfully. After all it was his city; it was his brain which had made her what she was. Those two universities, the finest in the world, had been his conception. The hospitals, white-fronted, flower begarlanded and hung with hundreds of flags, were of his building. It was he who had cleared out the dreaded foreign quarter, which the Soviet Government had allowed to become a very sewer of humanity, and erected the great warehouses there, every one of which was filled now to the topmost storey. It was he who, with a mayor of his own choosing, had studied deeply the question of civic administration, who was responsible for the wonderful transport, the perfect sanitary system, the broadening of the streets, the wonderful

schools. All these things had come under his rule, almost at his instigation. Pride was right. It was unconscious ingratitude. The people had these things — they belonged to them — all thought as to their source had passed. Not once for him had those cathedral bells rung out their almost barbaric note of welcome. Not once had any crowd, such as he saw now, filled the streets and waited for his coming. Blazoned upon a hundred huge banners reared in prominent places he could read from where he stood the amazing electoral results. Nobody wanted anything more to do with the government which had brought prosperity to their doors, which had reëstablished them in twelve short years amongst the nations of the world. Nobody even thought of these things. There must lie somewhere engrained in the minds of men, he reflected, a sort of craving for the pageantry of life; to see life itself decked out with the trappings of ceremonial usage, an unconscious survival of the delight of savage ancestors in processions and drum-beatings. When the time came for the natural revulsion of sentiment, people would think of him without a doubt, historians would praise him, they might even raise a statue to his memory. And in the meantime those hideous figures telling their humiliating story of his defeat, and a crowd beside itself with delight!

Trotsk and his men, who had ridden back, reappeared. In the distance, coming nearer, was a slowly breaking wave of sound, of rapturous welcome. Samara felt a sudden quietness steal over him. He had come to this place that he might fully realise and ever afterwards forget this great blow of fate, that he might never look upon it as in any way accidental or dubious in its import. He was discarded by the will of the people. The hurt and grievousness of his humiliation

seemed to him just then as nothing compared to the sharp pain at his heart when, from the sudden baring of heads, he knew that the moment had arrived. He gazed down, tense and motionless. The open automobile came into sight. Inside was a solitary figure — Nicholas Imanoff, in his prohibited uniform of white and silver, his hand to the salute, looking to the right and to the left — Nicholas, alone!

"I am afraid," a familiar voice said behind him, "that I have rather spoilt the procession."

Samara turned slowly round. He gripped the iron bar above his head until he almost fancied that it bent in his grasp. He stared incredulously at this impossible vision.

"Such a beautiful gown it was they had for me to wear!" Catherine went on. "White, all covered with pearls, and a real Russian headdress. It would have suited me wonderfully!"

"What are you doing here, like this?" he asked, and for once in his life his voice was broken and choked.

She laughed up at him. She was wearing the plain dark clothes and small hat with the rather faded flower, in which he had first seen her. On the ground by her feet was a square black box, she had just set down.

"I am Miss Catherine Borans, from the Weltmore Typewriting Agency," she announced. "You observe that I have not forgotten even the typewriter. Like a perfect secretary," she went on, "I have made all the arrangements. I have an automobile waiting at the side entrance. The streets at the back are absolutely empty. Your bag is packed and in the car with mine. We have just twenty minutes to catch the train."

"Where to?" he asked, a little dazed.

"The perfect secretary," she whispered, with a wonderful smile, "knows exactly where to go. A little way

beyond Monaco, a little way into the hills, a few yards down a rose-entwined avenue of olives! We have plenty of time, but I think we ought to go!"

Nicholas Imanoff was mounting the steps of the cathedral. The bells, which had ceased for a moment or two, suddenly pealed out in their widest clamour.

"For us," she murmured, her arms stealing out towards him. "Wasn't it wonderful for that to happen just as you are going to kiss me!"

THE END